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POETRY

GLAD OF EARTH

THE EARTH TURNS SOUTH

JEHOVAH

FICTION

MOUNTAIN

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

NIGGER

A NOVEL

BY

CLEMENT WOOD

Author of "MOUNTAIN," etc.



NEW YORK

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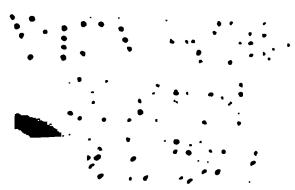
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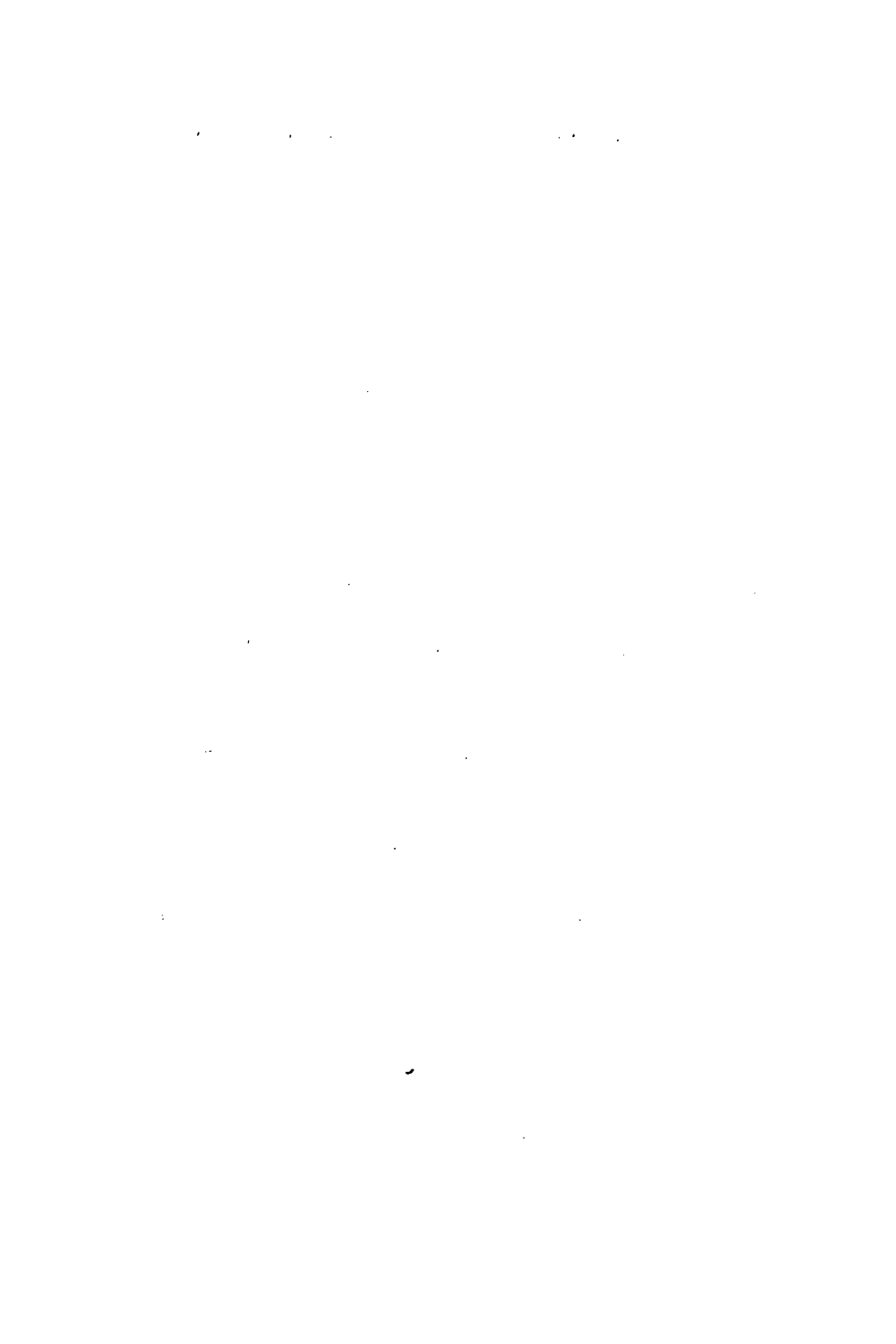
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BOOK I

GENESIS

NIGGER

CHAPTER I

THE SWAMP

THE hollow baying of a bloodhound set the silence trembling. The small boy woke, startled, from a dark, unhappy dream, and sat up on his pallet, huddling the frayed quilts around him. The familiar unbroken blackness of the cabin was a comfort. Again the deep, solemn tones, booming out of the distance, entered and filled the room, throbbing and pulsing in the peopled shadows.

“Mammy!”

From the thick gloom where the bed should be, a heavy, moaning breathing reached him.

“Mammy!” he whimpered. He started up; the protecting quilts fell away from his bare body; his naked feet scuffed and slid across the floor. “Mammy! Gram'ma!”

He plumped himself into the bed beside her,

shaking her old shoulders in panic, and sobbing, "Gram'ma! I's skeered—"

The tepid body twisted out of his hands into a tense sitting position; a senseless jabbering whirled and danced from the mumbling lips.

"Gram'ma! It's Jake! I's skeered—"

"Dar now!" The stiffened figure curved a protecting arm around him, and drew him within the covers. "Dar now. . . W'ut skeered you, honey? . . ."

"A dawg. . . I heard a dawg. . ."

Again the booming call for prey shattered the rustling noisiness of the night world without.

"Bloodhoun's . . . bloodhoun's, honey," she muttered. She slid to the floor; the quilts trailed and whispered across the wood, as she made for the window, and stood on her knees on the split-cane chair beneath it. Her chin cleared the high lower sash; Jake stood beside her, caped in the quilt, round eyes boring the dark.

The voices of the dogs changed to an uncertain bickering. All at once this altered to the deep firm note he had heard at first. Nearer now—it was at the nearest end of the field. An

uncanny dancing glow stained the background. The undergrowth complained at the leaping insult of heavy bodies crashing through. The light came closer.

A lone hound snaked through the blackberry bramble, headed for the house. Then there was a whirling, writhing tumult of dogs—dogs vaulting the briars, curving in to right and left, leaping over each other—six in sight at one time. The red radiance was just behind, as the panting jowls neared the log walls, sniffed and questioned the woodwork. Three scared black faces flared below the torches: one a knot of lightwood, the other two oil-soaked bundles of rags in flame. Quarter niggers. . . . After them half a dozen white faces scowled beneath black wide-brims.

Grandma pulled the wooden shutter closer; only the tiniest slit of the picture showed. The harsh, water-soaked trudge of the masters' boots halted before the door. The dogs whined and worried around the shack; one, growling, teased at a loose board. Jake felt his body within the quilt run cold.

Again the sudden bell cry of the leader lifted.

“That’s coon smell,” grunted a heavy voice.

The dogs padded off; the light moved after them; then the men, shifting the shotguns in their cramped arms. Deep within the swamp the noise subsided; the ancient chorus of swamp frogs regained its hour.

"Blood-houn's," Gram'ma muttered. She crawled back into bed; Jake, unforbidden, found a place beside her.

He lay awake, long after she had resumed her heavy breathing. The guttural "croak, croak" of bull-frogs, the shrill treble of tree-toads, alternated in soothing monotony.

This was the first sound that Jake could remember. Long before he had been allowed to creep down the single log step to the damp soil outside, his hours had been measured by the steady beat of the unending symphony.

"Know w'ut dey tells yer?" Gram'ma had crooned to him. "Knee deep! Knee deep!" The shrill voice shifted to a cavernous bass: "Better go roun'! Better go roun'!" Out of the songing heights of cypress and swamp, pine, the piercing "Knee deep!" Back from the dismal depths the guttural harshness of bull frogs, "Better go round! Better go round! Better go round!" "Knee deep!"—

“better go round”— through every cranny in the swamp-locked cabin came the chorus. The boy’s memory travelled back no further than this.

At times came the cool “plunk, plunk” as the heavy bodies dove into the dead pools; and with it the disappointed hooting that broke and stilled the chorus—the weird hunting discord of screech owls, the hollow jeers of hoot owls, the rare distant laughter of the great horned owl. After an awed silence, the exultant swell of the hidden chorus rolled and shivered throughout the swamp again.

Jake learned these sounds first. Next he learned the geography of the cabin. There was the great flat clothes-basket where he slept; there was the big table, the roll of quilts for Gram’ma’s pallet, the little table, the bed, the chair. This was all: he was forbidden the one door, he could not reach the one window. The light that came through the door or window, like the thick swamp shadows, was black, even at sun-hot noon. The oozy soil that tracked the rough pine flooring was black. The night was blackest of all.

He must have known a mother; but he had no

recollection of her. "Yo' po' mammy been an' sol' up de state," Gram'ma told him again and again. "She 'n' yo' buddies 'n' sisters. No-body lef' but you 'n' me 'n' yo' po' pappy."

Then would come a groan from the bed, from the grotesque bundle called "pappy." Jake never remembered seeing his face; there was only the spasmodic tossing of the hunched covers, and the endless groaning. The boy was glad at last to escape from the cooping walls to the ooze without.

Here a world of playmates awaited him. It was a long time before he saw his first frog; but smaller neighbors were at hand from the start. There were red ants—hills upon hills of them. The boy soon made friends with them. It was a continuing pleasure to study their toil. His chief admiration went to the few great-headed ones, who came out only rarely, looked about, and then returned to the unseen underground plantations. Meanwhile, the hundreds of lesser ants scurried about their tasks, removed the dirt, dragged back the crumbs of pounded corn and the bodies of flies and bugs, bore the dead out of their quarters.

Ceaseless work for the many; but a clever few escaped.

After the ants, there were the lizards to be studied—the gay-colored gentry who circled the huge pine trunks, the brown ones basking on the logs and rounded rocks, the lithe chameleons, teetering on the young leaves, and, most wonderful of all, the water lizards. Some were small and brown and slippery; you caught them with the sudden flirt of a gourd. Others were huge and smoothly fat and colored with evil splotches of muddy white and hot scarlet. These were the grandmother lizards; you could not catch them.

After the lizards came the crawfishes, building their crumbly clay cones; and the great hairy spiders, with striped backs and unwinking jet eyes; and the dazzling dragonflies; and the frogs. From the hidden “tree-deedles” to the ancient bulls, Jake learned them all.

There was a day when he returned to the cabin, and found the bed empty. He asked no questions of Gram'ma; and that night he slept with her above the thick quilts on the bed.

The father with his groaning was gone: that was all. No one ever told him which rain-channeled mound in the slaves' burying-ground had been humped up as a final cover for the pain-racked body.

The absence of his father had one advantage: it gave Jake summer clothes for the next two years. One shirt was all he wore, tucked up and basted by Gram'ma's awkward fingers. In the winter he wore trousers as well, slashed and pieced out of the father's homespuns. There came a summer—Jake was now seven—when Gram'ma told him, "You's ol' enough to go to de fiel's, Jakey, 'n' he'p me pick cotton. Overseer he say so. Hyah, take dis bag. . . ."

He started to follow.

"Wait a mite, honey. Dat's yo' only shuh't. You cain't wear dat out." She pondered, chattering meaninglessly under her breath. "Hyah—dis croker-sack'll hatter do."

Jake obediently stripped off the one precious shirt, while the woman ripped a hole in the bottom of the sack, and two in the sides, and slid it over his fresh tan shoulders.

"Ouch! Dat tickles . . . scratches . . ."

“Come on—shet yo’ trap.”

The improvised shirt tormented every step he took. It rasped and pricked the tender skin like a robing bed of nettles. For days the flesh was darkened by its touch; but the pricking novelty wore off, and the adaptable human covering toughened to the inevitable sackcloth. Croker sacks thereafter were prized around Gram’ma’s cabin; following each visit to the master’s stables, when the cow-feed or horse-feed bags were being emptied, she returned with a tell-tale bulge under her skirts. Thus she clothed the otherwise naked.

None of the stable hands told on her; for “Grandma” was a privileged person around the quarters. She had been brought direct from Africa; and, whenever she became excited, would jabber unintelligible imprecations, in some forgotten clicking dialect. This was sure proof that she talked with the Old Man himself, and earned her the reputation of a “cunjur” woman. She capitalized this to the utmost, in order to keep the bottom of the meal bin white.

It was after he began his cotton-picking that Jake got his first full view of a white man.

He had heard much awed talk of the masters; when he saw the overseer at close range, it was with a sinking shock of disappointment. A white man did not look like a god, or even a superior. Yet his tones at once taught Jake that he was. His word was law: no plea from a slave could bend it. God, Jake was told, sometimes heard a black man's prayer. In this respect the overseer was not a god.

One day, while the picking was going on, Judge Lowe himself rode to the field. Here, to Jake's amazement, was a white man in whose presence even the overseer stood bare-headed. The negro boy edged closer, open-mouthed, hand still clutching the fluffy cotton snow, to share the wisdom that spilled from these puffy, all-powerful lips.

"Looks good, Anderson. The soil works all the time; can't you make your hands keep up with it?"

"Pretty near."

"Ah, the ground works day and night too: any clod's wu'th two niggers. There ain't a richer bit in the Black Belt."

The Black Belt! Jake understood that much of what the master said. He had been

born in it; as a boy, its blackness was all he knew. The mention of Black Belt ever thereafter brought up a vision of a sweep of swampy darkness, stretching from far-off "Georgy" to the unmentionable horrors "down de ribber," and South and North as well—a region of bogged cotton and mired cabins, set within wild flooded lowlands, penetrable only to fleeing slaves and the bloodhounds of the white masters. These could go anywhere: there could be no city of refuge for the dark Black Belt folk.

One morning—Jake was sleeping on the pallet now—Gram'ma did not rise when he called her. Her eyes were red glitters, her twisted mouth moaned brokenly the clicking jargon that always shook him with fear.

"Gram'ma! Gram'ma! Hit's me—Jake—"

The red eyes did not see him. He ran to the quarters, and told one of the house servants. Several accompanied him back to the cabin; then sent him on to his work. That night, Gram'ma too was gone.

"Yo' granny, she daid," one girl told him.

"Not her," a grizzled stableman insisted. "She cain't die. . . . Didn' you see dat ol'

gray cat go slinkin' out er de cabin? Listen—dar's her, a-yowlin' to beat de ban'! She hear w'ut I's sayin'!"

"Dasso!"

"De Lawd's trufe!"

One brazen, strapping fellow taunted, "Kitty, kitty! Go get dat cat, sonny."

"Don' you do no sich thing! Dat's yo' granny's ha'nt, dat is. Don' nebber tetch her," several warned him solemnly.

The lonely boy watched the cat's peculiar comings and goings for several weeks. Once or twice he called "Gram'ma! Gram'ma!" softly, when no one was near. The cat yowled an unintelligible answer: it sounded like Gram'ma. He left the cat alone after that.

"Dar, I tol' you so," the wiseacres repeated solemnly, a few months later. "Dat cat gone: but she ain' die. She done been translated. You'll hear her yowlin' agin'. Better min' yo'se'f den; Gram'ma's at de debbil's business!"

Jake was twelve when this death occurred; and there were no other tenants to fill the swamp cottage. So he continued to occupy it,

putting in his hours at the back-breaking cotton-picking. The years passed above him, full of incidents, significant to him, which mattered to few of the rest. As one of the field hands, he hardly noticed the departure of the "old master" to Montgomery, to take his seat in the first government of the buoyant confederacy; or the gay "horse and away"-ing of the young masters, to the last one of them. What little he learned of the war came from Jim Gaines, a "hand" from the next plantation, rented out to the Lowes.

"Dey's fightin' all ober de Nawth. Young Mas'r Bob he killed fo'teen 'damn Yankees,' he is."

"W'ut's er damn Yankee, Jim?"

"Ain't you iggerunt! Dem damn Yankees say dey goin' ter free de slaves."

"Free 'em? Free us?"

"Foolishness. Whuffur you want ter be free?"

"I dunno."

"Dar now! Jedge'll pertec' us—Jedge an' de young mas'rs. Mebby dey'll let us fight—soon. How ol' is you, Jake?"

“Dunno.”

“You dunno nothin’. I’s nineteen—you mus’ be goin’ on eighteen.”

“ ’Speck I is.”

“Sho you is. You watch—dey’ll let us fight in a year. Come on.”

Discipline had insensibly slackened; the black boys were off for the afternoon. Jim usually spent the time at the other end of the Gaines plantation, by the river; and then retailed to unsophisticated Jake the impressive tale of his “crap-shootin’,” liquoring, and other banned joys. Today, however, they wandered up from the swampy footlands to the sandy pine hill beyond the “big house,” exchanging woodland lore and speculations concerning a hundred subjects, including the girls in the quarter.

“Dat Mayella’s a spry piece. W’en I marries, I gwineter pick a piece spry as her,” Jim volunteered.

“Yeah.”

“You know Mamie, Miss’ Agnes’ girl? She been goin’ wid de overseer at our plantation. Dey goin’ ter make her a fiel’-han’. She good at pickin’.”

“Yeah?”

"Yeah. She gwineter pick a baby out er de bushes . . . soon."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Man, you oughter come down to de pier on our plantation. Dem gals! Umm!"

"Yeah?"

"Whuffur all you say is 'yeah?' Cain't you say nothin' else?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah, yeah! Say it, den. You cain' fool me—dat Phoebe, w'ut come ober wid Miss' Clopton, she make eyes at you all de time you wuz dar. You make a hit, man!"

"Me?"

"Naw! Haw, haw! Ain' you de easy! You make a hit, man!"

"Yeah."

"Wid a yaller gal, too."

They reached the neighborhood of the post road. Barring their way rose a gray-rotted skeleton of timbers, and, off to the side, two weather-bitten posts. "You oughter be skeered er dem pos'es, Jake."

"Huccome?"

"Dis de ol' gin—dem's de whippin' pos'es. Ain' dey whup yo' pappy ter death hyah?"

"My pappy!"

"Dat's wut my ma say."

"Did she say . . . w'y?"

"He tuk on so, we'n dey sol' yo' maw up de state. Ain' you skeered?"

Jake took a frightened glance around. No one was to be seen; no vengeful white faces peered through the bushy undergrowth of pines. Only the strident bickering of jays, flashing blue lightnings in the sunlight, broke the sultry quietude.

"I ain' skeered er nothin'," he asserted firmly.

Jim watched him in awe as he stripped off a blackened silver, and transferred it to a hand sticky with half-chewed sugar cane.

"W'ut's dat fer?"

"Dis mah luck piece, Jim. I got a rabbit foot; I got a snake-skin; I got a slick buck-eye; now I got dis."

"W'ut you gwine do wid it?"

"One half stays wid me: one half gits buried whar dey planted Gram'ma. Den dey won' whup me on no whuppin'-pos'; Gram'ma'd ha'nt 'em ef dey did."

Jim regarded the orphan with renewed rev-

erence. True kin of Gram'ma! . . . "You wouldn't dare!"

"You watch me. . . . Lawdie, dar's de horn! Come on an' feed, bad man."

"Maybe dat Phoebe'll be dar."

"I'll be dar."

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK BELT

ONE broiling noon Harvey, a stable hand, came to the field where Jake and a dozen others were lounging over their pails of lukewarm dinner. "You all gotter knock off wu'k, an' come ter de big house."

"W'ut's de rucus?"

"Ol' Massa's goin' ter make an oration."

"Noration, you says?"

Harvey sneered cuttingly, "Noration, you says. A speechifyin'. I fergits I cain't talk elegant ter corn-fiel' coons."

When they reached the shaded portico of the mansion, they were lined up according to rank. Jake's eyes wandered over the uneasy rows; there must be two—three hundred of them. He recalled hearing the overseer boast that Carlowville, the nearest town, was the "boss town" in southern Dallas County,—a "ree-stricted" town, in whose neighborhood

no man could farm unless he owned at least a hundred slaves. Jake noticed, with some disquiet, that most of the neighboring gentry were on the porch. He knew them—he had seen them through back doors and windows, at frequent Christmas and New Year parties; even the ditching negroes could pick out most of the assembled figures. What were they all doing here? More work, probably. . . . Or a change of masters.

When they were in order, Judge Lowe came forward; his empty glass clinked against the broad wooden coping. Clearing his throat angrily, he surveyed them through reddened eyelids.

“Former slaves of the Lowe plantation—” an appreciative chuckle from the rear punctuated the pause. “Citizens of this grand and bloodily united republic, it has been made my duty to notify you that you have been freed by constitutional amendment. You are free to go where you damn please; and the sooner those of you who intend to leave get out of Dallas County, the better for them. Those who want to remain on the plantation will be paid for their work. The field hands will be permitted

to rent the land they occupy; Mr. Anderson will 'tend to the terms. See him." He half turned to go. ". . . That's all."

There was a shuffling uncertainty, but no other response from the bewildered servitors.

"Don't you understand?" he shouted abruptly, his face darkening. "You're free, damn you!"

"Three cheers fuh Mistuh Linkum!" a subdued quaver answered him.

Judge Lowe came slowly down the steps to the group from which the cry had come. His breath reached them, flavored with toddy, genteel, mint-sweet. He peered from under bushy eyebrows up and down the line. "Jack—Willis—I know you. . . . Jerry—Jake—Mamie—good niggers. . . . Mamie Brown—ah! Jim Gaines. Step out, you black bastard."

Jim's face went chalky; he sagged at the knees. His companions nudged him forward. A flask bulged within his hip pocket; he smelled of liquor.

The Judge regarded him dispassionately. "The man who says that in the Black Belt, for the next fifty years, can expect the whip-

ping post . . . or worse . . . before he leaves the Black Belt for good . . . some way. Don't let me see your face again. Git!"

Jim got.

The others slowly scattered. There was no more field work that day.

Two nights later, Jake came humbly up to the back door of the big house, and asked to see his former master. Word was given him to come around to the front.

"Well, what can I do for you, Jake?" Aunt Marina's cooking was enough to put an abolitionist in a good humor.

"'Scusin' yo' pahdon, Jedge, I wants ter git married."

"I'm damned! That's a good one! The law makes you free—an' you want to get married. Who's the gal?"

"Cunn'l Clopton's gal Phoebe, suh."

"I see, I see. Well, I've got no objection. I'm a free master now, remember; I don't have to bother any more with your troubles. What does the gal say? Want me to talk to the Colonel? Or do you want me to convey Cupid's billet-doux to the wench, like John Alden

in Mr. Yankee Longfellow's poem? Speak up, nigger. What does the gal say?"

Jim punished an ear in embarrassed bewilderment during most of this. Judge was smiling, anyhow. . . . "She haven't no objections, suh. We's already . . . been 'sperimentin' fer some time."

"So that's the kind of gal she is!"

"Oh, suh, dat wusn't nothin' onexceptionable wid her. But—but she's a good gal."

"Of course. Not more than a dozen darky Romeos a week. I know those yaller gals. Want me to marry you?"

"Well, seein' you's jedge—"

"Now listen, Jake. You could get that negro preacher, Brother Jones, ain't he? He'd do. . . . But bring her along. Where is she?"

"Phoebe! Hey, Phoebe!"

Out of the dusky shadows beside the house came the bright dusky face. Aunt Marina was called, and the other house servants. The white ladies were a crescented blur on the porch, beneath the scented glimmer of white clematis; the young men were otherwise engaged, in some low smoke-blue room in the

Dallas House, in Carlowville. The judge, hugely genial, pronounced an improvised ceremony. The lives were knotted.

“You’re a good nigger, Jake. Anderson,” he singled out the overseer, “see that this boy has a cow for a dowry; and tell Colonel Clopton to do as well for the gal. Good night, now.”

“Jedge—” a timid voice spoke out of the gloom,—the voice of Tom, Harvey’s brother, another field hand. “I’d like ter git married too—wid Pearl, er Emith—”

“You go to—Washington! The plantation hasn’t enough cows to go ’roun’. Good night, all of you.”

So it was that Jake and Phoebe set up home-making, in the hidden cabin at the gate of the swamp. This was in July; and the ancient milk cow, and the gift of a pig from the girl’s former master, made the first winter’s food problem an easy one. Just after the new year a boy, a squally, puny youngster, widened the family circle—little Isaac, the first of five.

Peace and plenty left the cabin, after the first rich year. There was, to begin with, a dearth at the big house—a dearth that reached

throughout and beyond the Black Belt, as part of the harvest of the red years just gone. Jake had treasured two Confederate bills, presented him one Christmas in a burst of jubilant generosity following piling victories. When the need came he dug them out of the crazy quilt, and presented them at the store. . . . They laughed at him. Later he heard many times that there was a safe full of such bills at the big house . . . worthless. The negroes were drifting off the plantations; this he could see. Their absence left the land untilled, the corn to sprout in the husk, the cotton bolls to pop open and rot unpicked on the shrivelled stems. These were lean years at the big house—at all the “big houses.”

Then there were his own problems, as tenant farmer. The cow died the next Spring, of disease starting in one of her horns. There was no way to get another. Jake had no stock. He had been allotted fifteen acres at first by the overseer, of which six were swamp, four thick with runty second-growth pines, and the final five cleared. But he had no mule.

“Fohty acres an’ a mule,” grunted Tom, Harvey’s brother, whose land lay north of

Jake's. "Dat's w'ut dey promise dem niggers at de Freedman's Bureau. Fohty acres all bull-frogs an' tree-deedles; reckon we de mules."

"Wisht I wuz a mule," Jake added doggedly. "I mout git dat lan' plowed den."

"Plow it wif yo' 'mancipation, honey; plow it wif yo' 'mancipation," said Tom bitterly.

"W'uts dis yere 'mancipation I hears so much consarnin' of?"

"'Mancipation means you pay fer yo' own hoe, yo' own plow, yo' own slab er bacon, yo' own 'lasses—wid nothin' to pay fer 'em wid."

"Looks dat way, looks dat way."

In distress, Jake took himself to Mr. Parsons, the manager who had taken Anderson's place two months before, much to the relief of the negroes.

"Mistuh Pahsons, I cain't raise no cotton widout no mules; an' I cain't raise no mules f'um cotton-seed."

"What do you want me to do, Jake?"

"I dunno."

"Judge ain't got no extra stock."

"No, suh."

"You couldn't pay fer it, ef he had."

“No, suh.”

“Tell you w’ut I’ll do. I’ll rent that whole forty to Tom; he’s got an ox, an’ he’s makin’ out pretty well. Then you rent the three or four acres you need from him; I’ll look to him for the rent.”

“Yassuh.”

The new arrangement certainly could not be any worse than the old. Jake finally took three cleared acres, and he and Phoebe did about half of the work on Tom’s place, in exchange for the use of the ox. On this three acres an average year gave two bales of cotton, and forty bushels of corn; one bumper crop had reached three bales. His crops Jake sold to the Judge, or rather to General Lowe, who owned the gin. That one great year he almost broke even; but, when the year’s statement for supplies was deducted, there was not quite enough left to run them through the winter following. The burden of debt owed to Lowe’s store grew a little heavier each year.

This was so, even though there were at the end only three mouths to fill. Isaac thrived in a stunted fashion. But little Tom, the third boy, choked to death on a rind of bacon in his

first summer; Mary, who followed him a year later, died when only a month old. Mamie, who came last, after a lapse of three years, was the special sunshine in the swampy place. When she was only two, barely able to use her plump little legs to toddle out of doors, she wandered off alone into the dark morass. They found her body a week later. The swamp was not kind to children.

This was not surprising when, to the malarial unhealthiness of the place, was added the lean diet that the thin years provided. Lucky winters they had a pig to kill; more usually, the menu consisted, for three meals a day, of corn pone, dipped into pot liquor made from turnip greens and other garden truck in the summer, and washed down in the winter with coffee steeped from parched corn. At times there was "long sweetening," or molasses, to season this; usually their credit did not permit this addition. This was all the children had, unless a cup of milk could be begged from a sympathetic neighbor. This, liberally diluted with water, would go a long way, sometimes lasting into the third day. There were, of course, berries, plums, and peaches, in the opu-

lent months; but the greater part of the year nature was not so considerate, and her simple children made out the best they could.

“Come on, folks, git yo’ bags,” Jake would command, at sunset of a baking autumn day. They would reach the fields after sundown, Jake, Phoebe, Isaac, now seven, and “Judge,” a year younger. After picking three or four hours, the tired boys would pillow their heads on the fluffy bags, and go to sleep in the swampy rows, crooned into dreamland by the familiar falls and swells of the frog lullaby. After an hour or two they would awake, stretch their cramped limbs, and get back to work. They thought it great sport. Judge contracted rheumatism in this way, and died at eight; Isaac, always a weakling, hung on, with stunted body and slow mind.

Saturday was different. It was mill day. While Jake would work around Tom’s larger farm, little Isaac would shoulder the bag of corn and trudge off to the mill, six miles away on Dry Cedar Creek. It was an all day trip; he had to take long rests going and returning.

Gradually things grew better. In cotton picking time, the family would hurry through their

own plot, and work around the white folks' fields, or those of more prosperous negro farmers. Picking paid four bits a hundred pounds; a man could pick two hundred, a boy a hundred and fifty, in an average day. There were plenty of places to put this money, in the chill months that followed.

A hundred and fifty yards down the swamp was a rotting shack which had been empty for thirty years. As he sludged down the field one day, Jake heard a hail from the obscurity of the thicket that hid this derelict. "In Gawd's name, ol' Jake! Howdy, man!" A familiar figure straddled the rickety fence.

"Jim Gaines!"

"Dat's de boy!"

"Ain' you 'fraid er dem Ku Kluxes, er Jedge?"

"I done seed Jedge; he say I could farm dis lan'. Say he glad ter see one nigger movin' in. Come on in, man, an' meet mah Elly Lou."

A small figure was bent over a steaming iron kettle, stirring the clothes within with a barked cypress branch. "Elly Lou, dis is dat no-'count Jake I tol' you 'bout."

She turned up a shrewd, weazened little face, pocked and scarred. "Mus' 'a' got it f'um you, den. Howdy, man."

"She's a terror, Elly Lou is," Jim chuckled appreciatively. "Come on—I'll step down a piece wid you."

"How long you been married, Jim?"

"Not long, not long. Dat gal's only sixteen—an' I's thuhty-fo!"

"She—she—"

"Looks thuhty, eh?" His face grew somber. "I married her in Noo Or-leans, Jake. She was a crib 'ooman."

"Crib. . . . ?"

"I disrecollect you nebber knowed nothin! She was a jenny—a wench—a free 'ooman—"

"I unnerstan's."

"'Twarn't her fault. She ain' nebber had no folks; dey got her young. I tuck her out, an' married her. She's spry, an' no missin'."

"Got any kids?"

"Not yit."

Life became a more social thing, with these close neighbors. The two cabins conducted a constant open house to one another; Phoebe was much taken with the queer girl-woman,

who had seen so much, and was so little of anything. Finally a child was promised; but Elly Lou died on the day that the dead baby was delivered.

Jim went through the next month with a moody, hang-dog air. Partly to cheer him up Jake dropped by one Saturday night. "Wanter drop in at chu'ch tomorrer night, Jim?"

"W'ut's stirrin'?"

"Little Isaac's gwineter git married."

"New Zion?"

"Naw; dis gal, Polly Scales, she favors Nebo Methodis'; dey gwineter be married in de new chu'ch."

"Now ain't dat peculiar! I's gwineter git married Choosday night in Nebo Methodis' myself."

"You gwineter! Who gwineter hab you?"

"I got a quality nigger, I is. You know dat Miss Sophie Lide, f'um Lide's plantation? She de gal. I jes' walked over dis afternoon."

"Dat's twelve miles, man!"

"W'ut's twelve miles, wid a good looker at de other end? I'll come—en' you come."

After the two ceremonies, life in the swamp developed into a race between Sophie Gaines and Polly, Isaac's wife, as to which should bring the largest family into the cabined world. Jim's wife began it with little Jim, whose name evolved in course of time into "Waffles"; then the Lowe cabin was visited by an ebony stork, who deposited a young Daniel in the clothes-basket crib. Sophie's next was a girl, Hetty; Polly retorted with twins, Tom and Louis, and followed this up with a girl, Marthula, a year later. The Gaines household made a desperate attempt to catch up with a lean boy, blessed with the impressive name of Wonderful Counsellor; but, discouraged by the prompt appearance of Nazarena Lowe and Ophelia Lowe, Sophie gave up the unequal contest, leaving Polly Lowe to complete the rout with a seventh baby, named Pinkham, after the vegetable remedy which had just swept into vogue among the tan élite of Dallas County.

Polly's victory proved too much for her; she never regained strength after little Pink's appearance; and Isaac, who had always been ailing, died a year after her. Jake and Phoebe were thus saddled with the seven husky, hun-

gry grandchildren. These were accepted, as labor, and famine, and emancipation had been accepted before them.

“You got yo’s,” Jake would say to Jim, “I got mine. Dat’s all.”

“An’ mine ’s gone to cotton-pickin’,” Jim boasted in answer. “Jim’s earnin’ man’s pay now, an’ him ‘lebben! Den Hetty an’ Wonduhful all git in deir licks, too.”

“An’ you ain’ nebber sont ’em to school? Dan stahted w’en he wuz six; he done put in three winters a’ready now. Tom an’ Louis been goin’ two years; Marthuly stahted dis year. Nex’ year, I’m goin’ to sen’ all fo’ of ’em, an’ Nazareny, ter dis Snow Hill Institute. Dey goin’ ter l’arn somethin’.”

“School! Ten weeks er piddlin’ an’ loafin’.”

“An’ you say I dunno nothin’! Huccome dem white folks do w’ut dey wants? Huccome Jedge Lowe an’ Cunn’l Gaines an’ de res’ got so much lan’? Ain’ det smaht? Cain’t dey read an’ write? Answer me dat!”

“Do readin’ make yo’ skin white? Do writin’ gin you de vote? Do cipherin’ mop out de black?”

Jake pondered this from many angles. “I

wus twenty years ol' w'en 'mancipation come, Jim. I ain' nebber knowed nothin'. Dem childern gwineter hab ejjication. Dey gwine ter hab all dey can h'ist. I don' want ter mop out no black; I wouldn' hab 'em white, ner yaller neider, no ways. But dey gonter hab dis ejjication. *We* ain' had no 'mancipation; *dey* gwineter fin' it."

"We ain' had no—"

"Did Isaac fin' 'mancipation? He wu'k his sick han's ter de bone: he died. Did Polly fin' it, er dem little kids? Dey died. 'Mancipation don' mean wu'kin' an' sweatin', an no mo'."

"W'ut do it mean, smaht man? You know so much—you say it."

Again he pondered, face clouded heavily. "I dunno, Jim. But dey gwine ter fin' out."

CHAPTER III

“BOLLIN’ THROUGH AN UNFRIEN’LY WORLD”

OLD Jake stopped before the thicket of scrub pine that screened the Gaines house, one sleepy morning in July. He wedged his way between barbed brambles and long dew-beaded grasses, and scraped through the limping gate. The hinge had rotted away years before; the footboards furrowed the muddy ground. “Hey, Waffles! Little Jim!”

Impassively his eyes surveyed the ramshackle wreck of a cabin, the sagged bench below the rickety shutter of the one window, the filthy slop buckets piled upon it and the one weather-whitened splint chair. He had just left his own cleared and cleaned cabin yard, his orderly porch, his house with the glass windows. . . . Negroes had journeyed from Fatama and Collirene to see this; it had been the first negro house with real glass windows this side of Snow Hill. All of this had come slowly;

it had come through Dan and the rest of the children, who had learned at the Institute how things might be, and had made them grow so. Education. . . . Jim's children had never had education. . . .

A strapping black boy, full grown, rasped open the door. "Come in, ol' shouter! W'ut you wake us up fer?" He showed the full growth of the nineteen years that had elapsed since Sophie Gaines came to the shack, even if the warped pine scrubs in front of the place did not.

"Fer nine o'clock! Don' you nebber wu'k, Little Jim?"

"Not ef we kin he'p it, an' dat's gospel. Come on in—ol' man's back."

"Yo' pappy?"

"Same ol' bird. Dey let him out Choos-day."

"An' jes' gittin' back?"

"Yeah. He stop at de rigber, an' run in three gallons er licker. An' he fotch a new clock."

"Uv all de foolishness! Ain' you jes' buyed dat chiny-ware one? Cos' you eight dolluhs—"

"An' ain' paid fer yit. But dis baby's a

Lulu. Little bird pops out, an' say 'Coo-koo! Coo-koo! Coo-koo!' We run it so much las' night, she done tire herself down. But you kin see her." He stuck his head inside the door. "Hey, pappy—giddap! Hyah's Jake."

The visitor followed him into the slipshod murk of the hut. Hetty, Waffles' younger sister, seventeen and slouchily graceful, bent over a range long discarded by the "white folks," dousing careless hoe-cakes into sizzling hog-fat. Jake disapproved of her; she ran around indiscriminately with white and black alike. He held his eyes away from her body, in embarrassment; for four months he had noticed the swelling bulge distorting her trim shape. Sophie, Jim's wife, observed her grown daughter sleepily from a sagging rocker, while the younger boys and the father struggled up from their pallets and into their overalls.

"Howdy, Jim! How'd dey treat you at de county hotel?"

"Jails is all de same to me. I made out."

"Out, eh? I see dat. Dey kotch you fer sellin' still licker, an' you gits out an' stahts selling agin!"

“Gotter make a livin’. Dat’s w’ut dis heah pro’bishun’s fer, ain’t it?”

“You says so.”

The visitor examined the elaborate clock inside and out. “Some mo’ foolishness! An’ you a’ready got three! Boughten dis one on time, I’ll be boun’.”

“Sho did.”

“An’ er organ, an’ a surrey, an’ dat pitcher album, an’ I disrecollec’ w’ut else—”

Hetty prompted him cheerfully. “An’ dat big ‘Hell an’ Hebb’n,’ wid de Doorway pitchers. . . . an’ dat grammerphone dat won’ play. . . . an’ dat magic lantum. . . . an’ dat fo’ dollar diamon’ ring—”

“W’en you might er own’ yo’ own house, ez I does! Man, I owns it! Ev’y nail an’ shingle—”

“Like Tom Harvey boughten his’n, eh? Ain’ he boughten dat place fo’ times, an’ ain’ got it yit? De Probate Jedge say he ain’ got de right papers yit.”

“I got mine. Ain’ you ebber said ‘no’ ter nothin’ dey tries ter sell you?”

Jim chuckled. “ ’Member dat book mans

w'ut tried to sell dem Bibles wid de nigger angels? I ain't bought none er dem."

"Dat wus a sore white man! All dem beeyutiful books, wid de gol' claspses an' de cul-lud pitchers, an' nebber sol' a one! Dem white fulks up nawth don' know niggers is gwine ter be whiter dan snow, w'en dey reaches New Jerusalem."

Waffles broke in with boisterous, angry vigor. "Dey would hatter be whiter dan snow in Carlowville las' night, an' no mistake."

"How's dis?"

Old Jim cleared his mouth out with a gourd full of stale well water, and spat a cataract though the open back door. "Ain' you nebber goin' ter know nothin' uv w'ut goes on 'roun' you, black man? Yo' black face wouldn't a been wu'th a bit in town las' night."

"W'ut's dis? W'ut's dis?"

"You better ax w'ut's dis. You know dat Miss Nellie Gulley teaches at de county school? Black man, dey say, stop her on de creek road 'n' tried to 'sault her."

"My Gawd, man!" Jake's wrinkles grooved

deeper all over his face. "Hyah in Carlowville! . . . Tried to, you says. . . . Dat all he did?"

"Dat's a-plenty," Sophie put in darkly. "Ain' dey done got tergedder a whole passel er white trash, an' say dey gonter clean up de niggers? Jim wus in town. . . . ax him."

"White trash?" Waffles corrected. "Two er Jedge Lowe's boys wus dar, an' Mistuh Sam Clopton, an' dem Lide boys f'um Camden. . . . Quality, too."

Hetty, tired from the stooping, rested herself on an overturned tub, stroking her body to ease the discomfort. "Wonduhful heard 'em talkin'. 'Dat's de Gaines bunch,' dey say. 'Let's git dat ol' debbil.' An' pappy jes' outer de calaboose!"

Jake was on fire for further details. "An' den? An' den?"

Old Jim's smooth tones filled in the rest. "An' den some white mens comed back—dey been to Miss Hayes's boardin' house, an' 'zamin'd Miss Gulley—it wuzn't no nigger a-tall, but dat low-down cousin er hern, Tom Donahoo; he done black up his face, but she knowed him, an' he run lak a jack-rabbit, an'

dey kotch him hidin' in de hay in his pappy's barn. . . . An' dat wus all."

"But ef she hadn't er reckernized him, Jim?"

"Yeah, Jake. . . . Ef she hadn't. . . ."

"Dey wus ugly, dem white mens, you say?"

"Ugly as hell. Dey wus out fer nigger."

"Um-hmm, um-hmm. It ain' been two years since dey burn dat Joe Brown at Fatama, Jim."

"Dat's right, Jake."

"Dey wouldn' do dat in Carlowville, I be bou'n'."

" 'Speck dey wouldn'."

"Well, dat ain' w'ut I comed about." Jake shook off the shadow of the tragedy; his dark face creased with good nature below the grizzled hair. "I got a message f'um Phoebe, Miss' Sophie. She say you gotter make a pan er soda biscuits—fer de chu'ch tomorrah night—de union meetin'. Dat is, ef you all gwine."

"Not me."

"In cou'se you is, 'ooman! We all gwine. In cou'se you is," her husband grunted irritably.

“De hell I is! Wot de hell I gwine ter chu'ch fer?”

“It len's tone, 'ooman; tone! An' den, we's a 'ligious fambly, we is. Ain' I done name mah younges' a Bible name? Speak up, Wonduhful!”

Jake shook his head smilingly. “Dat ain' no Bible name. Who ever heard uv no ‘Wonduhful Counsellor’ in de Good Book?”

“You pusson! You grows iggerunter 'n' iggerunter! You'll fin' it sot right down dar —‘He shall be called Wonduhful, Counsellor,’ —preacher done pick it out for me. Wonduhful done gib dis fambly 'ligion.”

“I reckon you needs it. Well, I gotter be humpin'. Don' fergit dem biscuits, Miss Sophie. We'll be by tomorruh.”

When the large flock of Lowes, led by the two grandparents, and tapering from twenty-year old Dan down to mischievous Pink, just turned twelve, called at the Gaines gate, the family of good-natured law-breakers was, as usual, not ready. At length the grumbling laggards got under way.

Both families belonged to the New Zion Baptist Church, a venerable pine structure

on a hill outside Carlowville, whose cavernous interior could hold four hundred. The union meeting, however, was to take place at Nebo Methodist Church, the newer tabernacle which reared out of the swamp oaks half a mile away, and could house two hundred more.

The Zions assembled at five, and set to work at first demolishing the supper provided by the energetic sisters of the church. In less than an hour this had satisfactorily vanished. The stripping of the last chicken-bone was the signal for the singing to start. The women bound white cloth turbans around their unhat-
ted heads, and joined the men in the old favorites, "I's Troubled in my Mind," "Deep River," "You May Bury Me in the East,—"
"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."
Again and again they returned to

I'm rollin', rollin',
Rollin' through an unfrien'ly world. . . .

At last the singing line, led by Brother 'Zeke Foote and the two visiting preachers, snaked its way, still singing, toward the citadel of the Nebos. The ancient trees saw nothing startling or new in the savage faces

beneath the queer turbans: ten thousand years before, the lush growths in their homeland had flared to the same march, with many of the same mournful melodies.

When the line was only a block away, it stopped, to let the hosts take up the tune. "Go Down, Moses," set the young acorns trembling. The Zion congregation informed the others that they were going "to be ready To walk in Jerusalem, jes' like John." The Methodists lifted "The Gospel Train" in answer; and, to the marching harmonies of "De Ark Kep' A-moverin', A-moverin' Erlong," the visitors jostled into the half of the church reserved for them.

Now began the praying. There were six preachers present; and in this catch-as-catch-can wrestling in prayer, brevity was the soul of dishonor. The Lord was thanked for every single object in Dallas County at least six times, and for most of the remaining objects in Christendom, as well as in the lands of "de po' heathums" across the seas.

When the last "Amen" had died away, there was a rustling silence. Out of it Brother Elijah Reed, the ministerial host of the even-

ing, marched to the pine pulpit and spread wide the word of the Lord.

"I takes my tex'," he began ponderously, "f'um de Fu'st Epistle uv St. Paul to de Secon' Corinthians; 'Dose on de house; top-knot come down.' Dis tex' will furnish de substance fuh mah dissertation."

His fingers continued to caress the pages of the big book. His hearers forgot that Brother Elijah could not read a line, as his moving words shook their eager spirits.

"'Dose on de house,' mah breddren. De worl' am divided into two sorts uv folkses—dose on de house, an' dose under de house. De white man am on de house; dis Word uv de Libin' Gawd am fer him. De black man am under de house; dis Book uv de Blessed Lamb am fer him."

"Amen, Brudder. . . ."

"Dat's de Gospel!"

". . . Gawd, Gawd Ermighty!"

"Dey ain' one book fer white, an' ernudder fer cullud; one book fer po', an' one fer rich. Dar's one Scripchers fer saint an' sinner alike—fer sheep an' goats alike—fer de lion an' de lamb ali^be. . . ."

“ ‘Top knot come down,’ mah brudders an’ sistren. Dat means you, ez well as de white man. Some cullud folks sits on de house, too; dey sits on de house uv pride, de house uv sin an’ fornication, de house uv broken com-man’ments an’ smashed tablets uv stone. Dis word comes tuh dem—‘Top knot come down!’ You thinks you’s sump’n, you proud scarlet sisters, you proud sinful brudders. You ain’ nothin’—you’s less dan nothin’. Fer on de Day uv Judgment de Good Book says uv evil things, ‘Nothin’ shall be sabel.’ Even nothin’ shall be sabel—but you—you ain’ gwine ter be sabel. De ol’ griddle’s hot, an’ de grease sputterin’; an’ unless you lowers dat top knot, you gwine fry an’ wriggle till de fires uv Hell need mo’ coal—an’ dat ain’ nebber gwine be.”

“Lawd sabe us!”

“. . . knows it, I knows it too!”

“Amen, amen!”

Brother Elijah rose on and on, until he and his hearers had climbed an emotional Nebo. At last he came to an end; and immediately Brother Thaniel Parker, the youngest visitor, who had been to school at Tuskegee, took the pulpit. He banged it and pounded it until the

rafters trembled, and the sinners, had any been present, would have prostrated themselves before the altar of the Lord. Many of the congregation looked inquiringly at their neighbors; how could such people fail to heed words flung so clearly at their wicked heads?

After the second Methodist preacher had finished his exhorting, Brother Zeke Foote took the rostrum. Well did he justify his reputation, that touched seven counties, as a mighty striver with the Lord. He moved the mourners as no previous exhorter had done; dozens came forward in abject repentance, and Mamie Lide, Sophie's sister, who had never married, "threw a fit," tearing her white turban into shreds, and ripping her wrapper from the neck to the waist—a process that only ceased when she was led by sympathetic sisters to the Sunday School room in the rear and there dosed with stale sandwiches, pickles, ice water, and safety pins, until she was able to return.

It was now well after midnight; but the hungry seekers were still clamoring for more. As she reëntered, Brother Foote had given way to the last of the Baptists, old Peter Reynolds

from Fatama. He had never learned to write or read; but his knowledge of the Testaments was stupendous. He could quote chapter after chapter; and chapter after chapter he did quote, accompanied by an incendiary flow of comments, threats, and cajolements that lifted his audience now into the seventh heaven of religious rapture, and sank them again into the brimstone depths below the seven hells of abasement and abnegation. "You gotter come! You gotter come now! 'I am de way an' de light;' but de way am growin' rougher, an' de light dimmer, while you waits. 'I am de Resurrection an' de Life,' but dey ain't no resurrection for bodies gnawed by de maggots uv sin, an' dey ain't no life fer dem dead ter Jesus. I knows you sinners, ez you goes ker-nummixin' an' kerfornicatin' through de worl'. Don' hug yo' kerflummery an' yo' kerfornication to yo' sinful buzzums; hug de word uv de Libin' Lawd!

"Oh, mah breddren, who'll be de fu'st? Who'll come—now? His ebberlastin' arms is spread ter kotch de weepin' backslider; His breast ter piller de man er woman w'ut's fell

sebbenty times sebben times. Who'll be de fu'st? You . . . ? You?"

A sudden commotion in the back of the church, by the central door. Sweat-beaded heads turned as one; somebody coming to Jesus. . . . One man stumbled into the room. The light from the oil bracket lamps suddenly flickered. The man faltered forward, all alone, face wet and staring. Those near him, on the right side, saw that where an ear should have been was a red pulp, and that his drab shirt on the shoulder beneath was stained dark.

In the keen silence he came to the bewildered preacher. For a mcment he stood there. Then he tumbled in a writhing heap on the floor.

"Lawdie, Lawdie. . . ."

". . . Name uv. . . ."

Three or four men helped him to rise; his throat choked, his eyes rolled in desperation.

"Ike—Ike Lide!"

"Yeah," he managed to force out. "Run . . . Run lak hell. . . . White folks comin'. . . ."

"Here?" The queries were incredulous.

“Dey strung one nigger. . . . De bridge. . . .
Almos’ got me. . . .”

“Yo’ ear! Man, yo’ ear’s chawed off!”

“Yeah. . . . Noo Zion burnin’. . . .”

“Noo Zion! Our chu’ch—”

“Dey comin’! Better run! Goo’-by. . . .”
His tones wavered; he turned uncertainly.

“W’ut stahted it, man?”

“Nothin’. Jes’ talk. It’s stahted.”

Brother Reed stretched protecting hands over the pulpit. “Sit down, Liza. . . . sit down, Deacon—take yo’ seats, you no-’count weak-hearts! Dis is de Lawd’s house; dis is de Lawd’s book. He’ll pertec’ you. . . .”

“Not f’um white folks.” Brother Zeke Foote started into the rabble flooding down the aisle. “We all better lie low. . . .”

A rising babble swallowed the rest of it.

Jake Lowe, gathering his smaller flock around him, made for the nearest window. “Us fer de swamp. Dey cain’t fin’ us dar. Come on, Jim Gaines.”

There were no white men in sight when they paused for a moment under the cool shadows of the giant swamp oaks. The moon hung high in the west; a drowsy wind stirred in the

leafy branches. A heavy, low-flying night bird flapped away into the farther darkness. The far-off chorus of the swamp-frogs pulsed remotely in the glittering night.

Up the hill, toward Carlowville, a redder brilliance tinged the sky. A hidden uneasy swelling murmur came from beyond the hill. It grew louder, louder, to their frightened ears. . . .

There was a last clatter of feet in the underbrush. The unlit shell of a church lay silent and deserted in the glimmer of the July moon.

CHAPTER IV

DEEP RIVER

TWO men swung out of the dense oak shadows across the main street, and made for the front of Guild's store. The sidewalk chairs were deserted. Just inside the door four men sat. They were all old. The acrid smell of kerosene thickened the air, musty with stale grocery smells.

"Howdy, Mart. . . . Pick. . . ."

Old man Guild turned his shrewd, weazened face toward them. "Did yer git 'em?"

"Mart'll tell yer," Pick prompted servilely.

Pick Spraggins was the son of a river fleecer—a professional gambler. Pick drank too much—alone; he was not allowed in the Dallas House bar. Martin Lowe was the Colonel's second son. A night like this made them brothers for a brief, black hour.

"That short yaller nigger's hangin' from the bridge. They're after the other coon. It

was that Gaines boy, wasn't it? Sam Clifton's after that new nigger over to Hayes's boardin' house. . . ."

"'Twarn't neither." Pat Guild turned up the wick of the lamp a trifle. Carlowville still had kerosene lamps; the town was no longer to be mentioned with Selma, or even Camden; for the forty-five years since the war it had been a stagnant pool. "'Twarn't neither. I told them fools. It was that young Harvey."

Lowe flung himself into a chair. "What did they do, Pat?"

"The black bastards! That yaller nigger up and said I'd cheated him out uv a bale er cotton. Other coon put in his jaw. I chased 'em out; knocked one uv 'em down. . . ."

"You bet Pat did!"

The second and third old men wheezed and chuckled appreciatively.

"They'll get that Gaines boy, Mr. Guild; more'n half the crowd are after him," Pick Spraggins edged in.

The storekeeper remained undisturbed. "That gang's always cookin' some devilment. . . ."

"Come on, Pick," Martin Lowe swung to his

feet, and made for the door. "We don't want to miss any of the fun."

Out from the curving shadow below the bridge the dozen men eddied. Their eyes never lifted from the object huddled at the rope's end. "That's enough. . . . Any matches?"

"Here. . . ."

A spurt of radiating sparks, a crescenting arc of fire, a steady, wind-whipped flame, that leapt from the match's head to the soaked rags. There was a sizzling and crackling. The men moved further back.

"Won't it ketch the bridge?"

"Iron. . . ."

". . . . Come on; they gone down the Tilden road."

Three remained, ears drinking in the dimming moans, eyes fast on the holiday spectacle. The rich odor of charring flesh reached them. Bits of burning cloth drifted down, spurted, vanished in the dark babble of Cedar Creek.

"Got any fillings, Bill?"

"Yeah. . . . Where in. . . . That damned Chad Hogan took my sack with him! We can ketch him. . . ."

They turned at a brighter flare at their backs. Then they hurried up to the post road, and broke into a run.

Off from the Tilden pike two men cut down toward the swamp. They ran a bit, then slowed. When he came to a shadow, the leader jumped it grotesquely. "Whee-ee! Don' fall in, Neddie. . . ."

"You damn fool! I can't keep up with you. Here—try this again, Pud."

"Pud" Jackson took the bottle, and tipped it against his mouth. He raised it so that it obscured the moon. Cocking an eye judiciously, he lifted it higher, sighting at one sharp star. A decisive hoist; the star was out. He returned the bottle with a flourish, wiping off his chin. "Holy catfish! That's stuff!"

Ned Scruggs took an even longer swig. "Come on, ol' horse-thief. This the way?"

Unaccountably they were both running again. Jackson kept the lead; "Neddie" hiccupped and choked in the rear.

At last Pud stopped. "Ought to be 'bout there. Hadn't we better wait?"

"You got yo' forty-four. Go on, man!"

They came to the pine undergrowth. "In there." The man ahead flung his arms around his companion; they hugged and danced grotesquely. "We beat 'em!" Separating, they crept closer to the shack.

Voices came from the unlit blackness within.

"Whar's dat chiny clock? No light. . . ."

"For Gawd's sake, come on, Hetty!"

All of the Lowes had gone ahead, except Martha; she had stayed to help Hetty Gaines, who could not now keep up with the others. Old Jim fumbled about for the diamond ring, the crockery clock, other precious possessions.

Ned and Pud stopped in the shadow. "Hy! Come out, niggers, or we shoot! Come out. . . . Lively!"

"Don' shoot!" the old man's voice quavered.

"I ain' done. . . ."

"Lively, you black hog, or. . . ."

Jim's torn face shoved cautiously out.

"Move, there. . . ."

He came into the moonlight; Hetty slowly followed, resigned, pain-racked.

Pud was watching the rear as well. "Come here, you black wench. . . ."

Marthula walked around the shack and stood quietly before them.

Jackson steadied himself with an effort at dignity. "Nigger, you gotter git out of Dallas County, an' stay out. Where's that wu'thless son of yours?"

"Ain' nobody dar, suh."

Pud satisfied himself that this was a fact; he returned to the glaring moonlight.

"You gotter git."

"We's a-gittin', suh."

"Give you five to go. One. . . . two. . . . three. . . ."

Marthula grasped Hetty by the arm, and started off.

"Come here, gal." Pud leered broadly at his friend. "Old man fu'st; gals wait behin'. You come here—" He caught Marthula by the shoulder, and pushed her behind him. "You take that 'un."

"Mosey along, nigger." Jackson waved the pistol uncertainly at the old father. "Make it quick. . . . Git!"

He slipped the gun back into his pocket, and ran his hand familiarly up and down the daughter's bosom. "Plump meat; I likes 'em

that way. You come back this way, honey." He sought to drag her down the darkened pathway toward the road. Hetty moaned, and kept her place.

"Let go dat gal," Jim Gaines commanded shortly. "We's a-gittin'."

The white man did not hear him; his fingers clawed into the girl's waist; he grunted incoherently.

"Let go." Jim hardly raised his voice. "Let go, white man."

A moment later, and he had taken three great steps to the side of the ill-balanced pair. His fingers fell on the white man's fingers, and tore them loose. Panting, the two fronted each other.

Jackson's face worked blackly. "I'll. . . ."

Jim closed with him. His hand came against the pistol in the man's pocket. They struggled back and forth on the crackling sod. Scruggs, loosing Marthula, ran in to help.

He was too late. The pocket ripped, as the negro tore the weapon out. Back into the moonlight he leapt, the captured pistol glittering. "Run, gals. . . lak hell. . . ."

From two sides they came at him. He backed

rapidly. His foot hit the remains of a bench; he almost went down.

Then they jumped. At that moment, the pistol flared once.

Pud Jackson sank to the ground. "Oh, Jesus!" he screamed.

Jim Gaines, face chalky, held his place. The other man ran to the side of the one who was down. "Git you?"

"Winged my shoulder. Let's. . . ."

"Go on back, white mens." Jim, pistol still in hand, backed up the open stretch toward the Lowe cabin. He observed them blankly. "We's a-gittin'. . . ." The girls were already out of sight behind him.

"Let's get the crowd," Scruggs clung to the sleeve of the wounded man, holding him back. "He's got the gun. . . . They mus' be mos' here. . . ."

Jim, still backing, struck a tree; this time he fell to the ground. He jumped to his feet in fright. No one was pursuing. Pain wrenched and racked his back; he was not so young as he once had been. . . . He lurched after the girls.

At the entrance to the field the two white men met the first of the mob. "He's got a

gun, the black bastard! Shot me on sight. . . .
Runnin' away. . . . We can kotch him. . . ."

The rest came panting up, in answer to the frenzied call of those in front. There was a real reason for the lynching now! Shot a white man!

"Let's wipe 'em all out!"

Led by two undergrown boys, they reached the empty cabin, then flooded along the swamp to the Lowe house. Two or three stayed to smash in the windows and set fire to the bedding, heaped against the dry pine-board wall. The rest hurried on.

Shouts came from up ahead, and the sound of stumbling feet. This was all for a long time.

"'Member that possum we treed here?" Pud, easing along behind, asked the friend with him.

The other grunted out a broken laugh. "It ain't possum tonight. . . . Coon."

At last, up ahead, the nervous hush was broken by a shot. Those behind quickened to a headlong run. Two more shots. . . . then a silence.

They closed in from three sides. The body

of Jim Gaines lay across a weathered white log, face rooted in the oozy black soil. Here he had stopped and ambushed for his last fight. As the first stragglers appeared, a group of men led up a tense-eyed negro girl.

Marthula had done her best to keep Hetty up to the pace she set; but at last the older girl had stumbled, fallen, refused to rise. Here the white men had found her. The hands binding her arms steadied her, as she saw her father's body.

"He's dead, all right, all right. You got him, Wince."

"I got that nigger," Scruggs disputed with drunken belligerency. "Ain't he shot Pud Jackson? I plopped 'im, I did. You seen me—didn't you, Bob?"

"What'll we do with this gal?"

They examined her curiously; there were nudges, coarse whispers, pleased leers.

"Sho she is. . . . Look at her, man!"

"Better let her go," young Winston Lide urged. "She didn't shoot anybody. . . . She's 'most dead, anyhow."

"Let her go?" Scruggs bawled out. "Let her go, he says! Let her go! Ain' she told

her pa to kill Pud Jackson? 'Shoot him, pa; kill the white bastard.' Ain' I heard her? Let her go!"

". . . She say that?"

"String her up!"

"Oh, Gawd, boss, I ain' done nothin'. . . I ain' said nothin'. . . Oh, Gawd!" She fell on her knees, writhing, squirming.

"Aw, leave her be," Lide repeated, half disgusted, half fascinated by the performance.

"Like hell!" Scruggs came up to her, his feet plopping in the swamp soil. He yanked her roughly to her feet, and struck with all his force upon her face. "Come on, boys!"

A ghastly scream rang through the swamp. . . . Another, another.

Marthula, less than a hundred feet away, hurrying desperately, her feet slipping off the bogged tussocks into the slimy pits between, turned back at the cry. There was an opening between tree trunks; she had a horrified vision of what followed. Then she could stand no more. She turned and stumbled forward blindly. She screamed under her breath—snatches of anguish, moaned prayers, endless sobbing repetitions of the Lord's name.

But through it all she held her sense of direction. . . . Now she ran more easily, along the drier way the family were to take.

She caught up with the others where they had stopped at a spring, above a dank, stagnant creek bed half a mile this side of Cedar Creek. She did not see them at first— so stiff and still they stood. The dark ended abruptly in an oasis of glaring moonlight. The fugitives were clustered gray against the gray tree trunks and gray trailers of Spanish moss. Then she made them out: Phoebe nearest, crouched with pricking ears at the sudden disturbance in the swamp noises.

The girl threw herself on her mother's knobby bosom, weeping and moaning incoherently.

"W'ut's de matter, 'Thuly? . . . W'ut did dey do ter you?"

At first they could get no answer. Then it came. "They're dead . . . Uncle Jim. . . . Hetty. . . . dead. . . ."

"Dead!"

"Oh, Lawdie, Lawdie! They're dead. . . . I saw 'em. . . ."

Waffles planted himself loweringly before her; Sophie slumped moaning on a ghostly

fallen log at her side. "Tell me erbout it, 'Thuly," he commanded. "Speak up. Dey. . . . dead?"

She dashed her arm across her eyes. "They shot Uncle Jim fu'st. Then they beat Hetty. . . . Lawd, Lawd. . . ."

"Whar wus dis? Huccome dey. . . . do dis?"

Marthula quieted enough to talk coherently. "We were at yo' house. . . . Two white men came, an' they . . . they grabbed Hetty an' me. . . ."

"Bad business, bad business," Jake muttered.

"Uncle Jim tried to make 'em stop. He took the white man's pistol. . . . He shot one man."

"Good fer dad!" And again, "Good fer him!"

"Then we ran, an' ran, an' ran. But Uncle Jim fell down; he couldn't go fast. An' Hetty fell down; you know, she couldn't run. . . . They shot Uncle Jim fu'st. Then they grabbed Hetty. . . . Oh, I can't tell it—I can't tell it. . . ."

"You's gotter," Waffles menaced. "Talk out, gal. They grabbed Hetty—"

"An' they hit her, an' they beat her. . . ."

She fell down. Some boys had brought ropes. They tied her legs, an' threw the ropes over some limbs. Then they pulled her up. . . . that way. She was a'ready dead, I think. . . . I saw 'em with knives. . . . I cain't go on!"

Waffles stood squarely in front of her; his eyes did not let up their concentrated stare.

"Oh, Gawd. . . . there was blood. . . . lots. I couldn't see no more; I ran an' ran. . . ."

"Aw right." Waffles stepped beside his mother. "So long." He turned to his brother. "You's big enough. You come."

"Whar you gwine?" Jake inquired.

"I's gwine atter dem white debbils. . . . Now."

"You gwine do no sich thing. Dey's white men, you fool! You come on. . . . W'ut kin you do to 'em?"

"Dey kill my pappy. . . . I kill. . . . I kill. . . ."

"You ain't a plumb ijjit, Waffles. Dey'd hang you higher 'n high."

"I gits me a white man. . . . now."

"Don' be a fool. You cain't he'p yo' po' pappy none dat way. Dallas County ain' no

place fer a nigger now. Wait till it cools down. You kin come back. . . . den, ef you wants ter.”

“We’s gwine. . . .”

“You ain’t. Be reas’nable, man. Ef you go back, it’s ’bout as sensible ez shootin’ yo’self. We’ll cross de ribber. . . .”

“How we gwine cross it? We ain’ got no boat—”

“Watch me. We’ll cross it. I says so; an’ w’en I says so, we does it. Den we leave dis Black Belt fer good.”

Doggedly Waffles stood his ground once again. He dug his foot obstinately into the crumbling clay soil at the base of a rotting stump; the wood scattered into the air, the light particles floating and dancing in the shafts of moon glitter between the great oaks and cypress. An owl hooted hollowly three times off toward Carlowville. The spring waters gurgled, gasped, choked out of the ground.

“I’m gwine take erlong de man w’ut shot my pappy.”

“Den you come back an’ git him. Quit yer projeckin’; it’ll be sun-up in fo’ hours. We

got three miles ter reach de ribber. We's was'in' good time. Come on."

He left off speaking, picked up his pole, and led the way toward the west. Phoebe wet her bandanna once again, to mop Marthula's fevered face at the next stop. Little Pink scampered after the old folks; the Lowes followed. Sophie took her son timidly by the shirt sleeve.

"Come on; you kin come back"

Waffles delivered one final kick at the rotted stump. This time the whole side of bark toward him cracked off, then the stump tottered and tumbled away from him. He watched it settle and lie, broken, defeated. . . .

He set out to catch up with his mother and the others.

BOOK II

EXODUS



CHAPTER V

UP THE STATE

JAKE set out on this leg of the journey confidently; he was a swamp negro, bred, yes, born to the forbidding blackness. Soon enough he led the others into difficulties. The trees reached higher, with interlocked tops that shut out the moonlit steel gray of the sky. They lost the hogback they had followed from the cabins to the spring, and floundered blindly ahead.

There were no towns to be feared. Pleasant Hill, Clematis, lay across the creek; and they had avoided it, as ground more familiar to the white outdwellers and charcoal burners. Like stiff, insensate antennae their improvised poles felt out the way. There was the barking of a dog to the south, that sent them creeping away from the river and made the way more roundabout. A dog meant people. . . . There was the endless, deep-fingered tarn they had to

skirt; this lasted, it seemed, for hours. At length they had turned west again; or so Jake insisted.

It was still dark overhead; but the uneasy grayness of day crept horizontally through the ghostly lanes of pines. They felt the dry crackle of pine needles beneath their sogged shoes. Before them a pocked and sluggish creek stretched, rustling south.

"We's los'," muttered Phoebe, sinking to a log.

"Gotter go back," Waffles gloated.

There was nothing to be seen but the unbroken swamp. The nearer bank of the creek rose in a slow hump; they did not climb it. Jake did not stop with the others, but continued ahead, up the hogback. They heard his shout, "Lawd. . . . de Lawd done foun' it. . . ."

"W'ut you foun'?"

"De Lawd done located it!"

"Located w'ut?"

"De ribber!"

They hurried to where he stood. Through the matted boughs the wide daylight stretch of water shone.

“Well, hyah we is.” There was no enthusiasm in Waffles’ voice.

One by one they emerged to the oozy, slippery top of the bank. They were a draggled crew: gingham, overalls, were dulled to one hue by the plastering mud; the dark line of water-soaked cloth reached in some cases to the waist.

“An’ now?” Waffles asked, nursing a night’s slow grudge.

Jake planted a foot firmly on the knee of a root-drowned tree, and swung his body clear. Nothing up the river. . . . and down. . . . Without a word he started south. Without a word they trailed after.

Then they saw what he had seen: a rude lopped-pine pier a hundred yards away, projecting into draggled cattails. There was a log shanty against the bank. They stopped; Jake reconnoitered carefully.

“Come on,” he announced. “Lawdie! Look hyah. . . . De Lawd will pervide!”

“Er de debbil.”

Waffles put his shoulder to the back of the rowboat; the father and the three older Lowe boys did their share; it slid over the slaty soil, and crushed upon the sogged water plants.

One by one they balanced to the seats. There were no oars; Pink brought two of the poles. They pushed off.

There was little current to speak of; most of the way the poles touched bottom. For a few uncomfortable minutes they drifted aimlessly at the middle, the useless poles dangling in the deeper channel. Then a swirl bent them inshore again, and the danger was gone. They picked a pebbly spit, and shored her. Jake held her head, ankle-deep in the river; the women and boys clambered out and ashore. The old man gave her a final shove with his pole.

"She'll fin' Mobile," he grunted.

"Dat's one banana town," grudged Waffles, more civilly.

The land was firm here; they bore straight inland, until they came to a barbed-wire fence, with a clearing beyond, and level rows of steel rails.

"Dis de Southern," Waffles announced proudly.

"A . . . a railroad, I reckon."

"Lawzee, man, dat's a fack—you ain' nebber seed no railroad before, nohow. Yassuh, dis

de Southern. . . . Run cl'ar to Mobile. Jes' like de ribber."

Dan and Louis were whispering off to the right. They were not argumentative, but sensitive Waffles gathered the drift of what they were saying. "Dis ain' de Southern, you says."

"This is the L. and N.," Dan explained carefully. "It runs from Selma clear into Mississippi. The Southern runs souf', not west."

"You ebber rid on her?"

"No. . . ."

"I is. . . . Huccome you know so almighty much?"

"We had a map," Louis explained. "It hung on the wall at school."

"A map! You had a map! You'd b'lieve a piece er paper 'stead uv a man w'ut's rid on de locomoter, I 'specks."

"This is the L. and N.," Dan repeated mildly.

"You's a plumb cock-eyed, knock-kneed, limber-j'inted ijjit! You don' know yo' nose f'um yo' lef' hin' foot! I's seed a map too, I is. All 'bout de Sarah Desert an' Iberia an' de Perlantic Ocean, I is. Man showed it ter

me wanted me to go to dis Iberia. I tol' him plain Dallas County wuz good enough fer me. I tol' him. A map! Yo' map don' know nothin'! Yo' map done mix up de L. an' N. wid dis here road. Dat's w'ut yo' map done done. I knows. Ax me. I tells 'em." Waffles spluttered in wordless disgust. "Uv all de iggerunt, mule-head. . . . A map!"

"Then why," Daniel asked politely, "do they have 'L. and N.' on that trespassin' notice there on the fence?"

Waffles looked twice at the offending board. "L. an' N., huh? So you says. So you says. I 'speck de man w'ut messed up yo' map done put up dat boa'd. Dat's w'ut I 'specks. Dis yere's de Southern. I done rid on it. I ought to know, oughtn' I? How 'bout it, Uncle Jake?"

"Well, you mout', an' den agin, you moutn'," the elder decided cautiously.

"Ef a man rides a mule, cain't nobody tell him it's a nox, kin dey?"

"Dat soun's reasonable."

"Ef a man rides de Southern, cain't nobody tell him it's de L. an' N., kin dey?"

"Dat soun's reas'nable too. But w'ut's de argyment, boys? Dis railroad leads ter Selma,

don' it? Dat's w'ut we wants ter know."

There was no dispute as to this.

"Selma's safe, I reckon."

"Safe enough," Waffles grudged. "Not fer me. We goes souf', we does. Ain' it so, Maw?"

Sophie assented silently.

"So long. Watch yo'se'f," Jake counselled.

They stood within the undergrown shelter until the three dejected Gaineses were out of sight down the tracks.

"We kin hit de ties." Tom joined the council of his brothers; he felt aloof from their sober souls, and had a secret sympathy for the Gaines' family. "That's the shortes' way. . . ."

"'N' git hit, I reckon. No, boys, we stays dis side er dis fence. I don' wan' no fence 'twix' me 'n' dis swamp—leastwise, not ontell I sees dis Selma."

Jake's word was still law. They stuck to the rougher going on the healed edge of the cutting. They saw only two farmhouses the whole morning—dingy clusters of whitish buildings napping watchfully in ploughed clearings. There were negroes at work too; but it was safer to

avoid all of them, until they got further away from what lay behind. They stayed behind the scrub screen, and pushed on.

About noon they came to greener ground, and the familiar oak and cypress again. Beyond these trees lazed a muddy river. A great bridge spanned it.

“Dis yere mus’ be—”

“The Cahaba, Paw. It runs into the Alabama.”

“Hyah’s whar we fin’s us anudder boat.”

“We don’ hafter do that. We kin cross the bridge, if we hurry,” Dan urged. “We haven’t seen a train all mornin’. . . .”

Jake allowed himself to be persuaded. For a moment they hovered above the tracks, then kited down. No one stopped them; they paid no attention to the frequent signs plastering the two-track way. Below them swirled and rippled the muddy expanse; one slip, and there would have been one less to continue the journey. Jake’s foot struck a loose spike; it wheeled and spiralled dizzyingly down. A spurted column of water, a faint splash, and only the frightened ripples remained. They

were glad when they regained the cover on the other side.

Soon after they had recrossed the fence, a freight steamed west—an endless, headless insect of dull red cars, pushed by a puffing engine.

Jake's eyes rolled in pious belief. "Lawdie, lawdie. . . ." He shook his head decidedly. "Dis yere de L. an' N.," he confided to his sons, after it had passed. He was converted.

Ahead of them lay houses on both sides of the tracks. They dusted off the caked mud from each other as well as might be, and took to the path beside the track. Their feet crunched brittle coke cinders. The tracks broadened to three, then four; another line came forking in from the northwest.

"Mo' an' mo'!" Jake's whisper was heavy with awe. "Dese here railroads. . . ."

A railroad watchman eyed them without interest. A delivery wagon drove past them on the road across the tracks, bound for the city; the driver paid no attention. Jake breathed with less constraint. No trouble so far. . . .

"Where we goin', Paw?"

“Anywhar. . . . Ez fur ez we kin go.”

“Mon’gomery?”

“Mebbe.”

“We’d better go to Bummin’ham,” Tom suggested. “That’s a high-toned town, that is.”

It was the middle of the afternoon when they reached the outskirts of Selma. There was a well here, and a bench. Phoebe collapsed heavily on the bench. “Go on, folks. I’s home.”

“W’ut’s eatin’ you?” Jake asked with husbandly solicitude.

“Hongry.” She smoothed her dress in rugged rebellion. “Dem chicken san’wiches I et las’ night ain’ gwine carry me one step funder. Here I sits, ontell I eats.”

“Now, Maw—”

“Listen, Thuly. I’s plumb tuckered out. You ’n’ ’Pheely go over ter dat cullud lady renchin’ out dem closes, ’n’ beg a bite er vittles. An’ hurry.”

“Don’ tell whar we come f’um—”

“Dey got brains, Jake, my chilluns has. You do w’ut yo’ maw says.”

Marthula led back a regular deputation. The washerwoman provided not only a big dish of

cold greens, and a whole panful of corn pone, but an audience of half a dozen neighboring women and children. The viands unlocked restraining caution; and the story of the flight was soon listened to with awed ejaculations of pious horror and relief.

“You’ll stay hyah,” the donor of the food insisted. “Selma’s a good town. . . .”

“We stay hyah,” Jake replied in humble certainty, “jes’ long ernough ter raise de railroad tickets up state. Den we gits.”

Next morning the boys followed the eager directions of the native negroes, and arrived at the pier. There was work and a plenty for all hands that wanted it; they came home with three dollars among them. Phoebe held on to most of it; and two more days saw enough of a fund to insure the trip to Montgomery, with something to spare. Their hosts would not take a cent for the hospitality; and on Friday morning the family marched down along the bluff to the railroad station. Phoebe, assisted by the sons, negotiated the purchase of the tickets. The train clanged in; they walked to the front end of the platform, and climbed aboard.

Jake sat hunched forward in his seat, gripping it with both hands. At length he relaxed enough to look out of the window, across the laps of Marthula and Nazarena. Phoebe sat knee to knee with him; the two other young children shared her seat; and the boys sat on the armboards, or stood in the aisle, as the crowded car rocked east.

"That's the river, Paw," Rena chuckled. "We ain' in no boat now."

"Praise de Lawd," he murmured mechanically, as his eyes took in the swaying panorama of sinking farmlands, the bird's eye view of trees and shingly mud flats and brown water. "Lawd, Lawd, ef dis ain' style now!"

The water ended, the banks climbed swiftly up toward him, the level farmlands stretched out at his side.

"Ef dis ain' style!"

Montgomery was a glorified repetition of Selma. The boys found work, the first morning, trucking in one of the warehouses along Commerce Street. It was Saturday, and Phoebe captured the dollars of two of them; but Tom eluded her. The grandmother had to pay six bits for a room for the week; but she held

on to the pennies, when it came to food.

Sunday. No sign of Tom. The rest located a negro Baptist Church, and spent a satisfying morning. In the afternoon, they stood for an hour watching the water falling back into the fountain, in the city's center, and then climbed Dexter Avenue to the Capitol. They walked the eight blocks around it twice. It was a wonderful sight, with the tall monument and the big dome and the cannons and cannonballs in symmetrical piles. They did not walk inside the grounds; they saw no negroes there.

As they went down the hill, the street lights came on. Rena, who could not take her eyes off the immense building on top of the hill, was the first to sight the light at the top of the dome. They walked backward most of the rest of the way down to the fountain. They went to bed early; sight-seeing was harder than work, any day.

The next morning Tom, his eyes unsteady and red-rimmed, turned up apologetically at the warehouse where Daniel and Louis worked, half an hour late. As soon as he could get a word in with his brothers, he started telling of his adventures.

“Maw’s goin’ to lift yo’ scalp, Tom.”

“I’d like to see her try! I had one time.”

“You didn’t spend all that dollar?”

“Man, I rolled bones, an’ rode on the merry-go-round, an’ drank beer—a regular souse! I met the cutes’ little kid—name Mamie Lee—only she’s got a regular fellar brakin’ on the Seaboard; an’ he comes in today. I lit this town up! Sad’day night—all day Sunday—”

“You ought to be ashamed of yo’self!”

“Watch me!”

But he reported as meekly as possible that night; and while the other boys did not hear what Phoebe said to him, it was Tom’s last defection in Montgomery.

Jake secured work for two nights, as a watchman. This came through a friend met at the church; but when he was found asleep when the day watchman opened up the second morning, he was out of a job, and only six bits the better off. Phoebe pocketed this too; and by the end of the week, she had enough to approach the ticket agent, and begin negotiations looking to a transfer of her charges to Birmingham. There was not enough, even counting three half-fare tickets. They put in another Sunday,

and half a week, before they were ready to go. But at last the servitude was ended; and, reinforced by a breakfast of chitterlings and strong coffee, they piled within the coach for the last leg of the trip.

They crossed the river again; the monotonous sweltering miles clicked by. There was no relief from the overpowering sun; no friendly screen of woodlands softened the steady beat against the parched fields without. At Clanton, they purchased cold fish sandwiches; they were still munching the last of these, when the train commenced to puff up into the hills. In and out of the climbing valleys it nosed its cindery way. The air grew chiller. They raced over several water courses, and at last the narrow streak that was the same Cahaba they had crossed on the bridge outside Selma. Oxmoor. . . the smoke of the furnaces eddied through the windows, and set them to coughing. One more mountain, then a long even slide down to the valley. There were houses visible all the way now—houses such as they had never seen in the Black Belt; not so grand as the big houses of the masters, and yet white and clean . . . perched up on whitewashed

stilts along the mountain-side, snuggled together into little villagy clusters, streaked together into solid blocks.

The train was running easily now, coasting and speeding toward the great city. Factories and furnaces reared suddenly, now on one side, now the other, and vanished as suddenly. There were endless railroad yards, with everybody busy. . . . One more immense plant—"De rollin' mill," the woman in front informed them—and, after coasting recklessly over three or four paved streets, the train groaned and slowed, then passed startlingly from the yellow sunshine into a gloomy cavern. There was the screeching of the brakes, the hiss of escaping steam, the darting transfer trucks just below the windows. They were here!

They crushed out of the dark passageway into the dusky reaches of the lofty station. There was light at the two ends; off to the right the train hid it, and above and to the left it was still dark. They clustered like spindrift whirled by an eddy; then Dan set out after the crowd, and the rest followed.

His way led through a double swinging door

marked "Colored," into the largest and most beautiful room they had ever seen. Big benches stretched on every side along the wall, there was a soda water stand, a lunch counter, a multitude of ticket windows, or windows for some purpose. . . . It was wonderful, and immensely bewildering.

They sat down on two empty benches, to get their bearings.

Birmingham!

At length Dan and Louis achieved enough spunk to address a man who stood nearby—a negro, but how different from the ones they had seen in Carlowville and Snow Hill! From his natty brown derby and bulging purple four-in-hand to his slicked oxfords, he looked like a picture.

"We're strangers here. We wanted to find Av'nue B. . . ."

Coolly this glass of fashion surveyed them. "Country niggers, eh? Yeah, Scratch Ankle's the place you're lookin' fer. Jes' hoof it south four blocks, then turn right, and you can't miss it. Watch out for the trains," he advised civilly, "the L. and N. hate to have any of

their engines spoiled." He departed airily, locking arms with a tailored Cleopatra who appeared in the doorway.

The colored matron was more helpful. They were soon on the way.

Tracks, tracks, tracks! They lost count of the blocks; only the street signs saved them. Powell Avenue, Avenue A—ah, Avenue B! They turned right, as directed. . . Houses, houses, houses!

After they had trudged half a dozen blocks, they felt more at home. These were negro houses.

Dan pulled out the slip of paper with the name and address the Montgomery preacher had furnished him. At length he found the number. The bell refused to work; a vigorous pounding at length evoked a supercilious, bald-headed man, yawning and stretching.

"Mr. Snow—does he live here?"

"Snow? Bill Snow? He died two years ago come next Spring."

Here was a difficulty!

The man in the house regarded them narrowly. "Was you friends of Bill?"

"We wanted to rent a room off'n him. We's

f'um Carlowville—f'um Dallas County. Brud-der Jackson uv Montgom'ry sont us," Jake explained, preëmpting the rôle of business man for the family.

"Now ain' that reemarkable! I got a room myself, all ready ter rent. Wuz you stayin' long?"

"Long enough," Phoebe put in. She did not like the suave, calculating glance of the city negro.

"An' yo' baggage?"

"We wears it." She adjusted her skirts decidedly. "Seein' as how Mister Snow's daid—"

Her manner decided him. "You come in, ma'am, 'n' take one peek at this room. It's jes' the place you're lookin' fuh—an' dirt cheap."

Mr. Yancey Wyatt—such, he informed them, was his business name—led them though the spacious front room into a squeezed bedroom. "An elegant place," he announced grandiosely. "View uv daisy fields whar the children can play, with the Juvenile Court building bringin' up the background—" He fumbled unsuccessfully with the shutter,

"Ef the windy opens," Phoebe assisted.

"Commojus bed, double, holds fo', without crowdin'; cheer, wash-stan' with genuwine crockery, floor space fer pallets, back yard fer washin' an' renching, supply yo' own tubs, settin' privileges on the front po'ch—"

"An' how much was you thinkin' of askin' fer this fu'nished room?"

"Two dollars an' a half, madam."

"A year?"

"A week."

"We wuzn' aimin' ter buy the house an' lot. Come on, folkes, we'se was'n' dis gen'l-man's valooble time."

Mr. Wyatt barred her way unctuously. "How much was you calculatin' to pay, ma'am?"

"Fer dis room, six bits a week; fer dis room an' de settin' room—I laks dat front room—two dollars a week. Not a cent mo'."

Mr. Wyatt located, with considerable difficulty, a dog-eared receipt book and a runty pencil. "You is payin' dis week in advance, ma'am?"

Phoebe closed with him, and shooed him away. She settled with her granddaughters,

grandsons, and spouse, upon the double beds, the rocker, the straight chair, and the washstand which the two rooms boasted.

They were in Birmingham, with a roof over their heads. Life was looking up.

CHAPTER VI

SCRATCH ANKLE

THEY never forgot that first night in Birmingham. The house of the shifty Mr. Yancey Wyatt was at the extreme end of a block of negro shacks on Avenue B. The street car, which ran before their door, turned at the corner and coasted one block south, before it sped west again on the wide loop along Eleventh Street to the affluent highlands. There were no houses across the street—only dusty bare fields, with, half a dozen blocks away, a grotesque huddle of dun buildings bellowing smoke from multitudinous tall vents. The dulled prospect stretched and diminished toward the sun-troubled west.

Their supper was nothing to boast of; and yet, after strangers' food for more than two weeks, it tasted home again. Marthula had bought a measure of meal, a pound of cheap coffee, and a mess of greens from the store

two blocks away; Phoebe borrowed the wood from the family in the other half of the house. They ate and drank everything she cooked.

When they seeped out to the porch again, for a moment they doubted whether they were at the same drab corner. A spell had been laid over everything—a spell of hot beauty. The sky was washed with a flaming glow, brightest upon the bellies of the low-hovering clouds. A pillar of solid fire shone off to the left; then a long mound of red winking eyes; and, in the building directly in front, ruddy gold flame. The fields were living from the touch; even the car tracks pulsed gold.

“Furnaces! Dem mus’ be dese furnaces, boys!”

“And that’s the rolling mill,” said Dan, piecing together what he had heard on the train.

The Johnsons, who lived just beyond the partition, understood the exclamations. Sarah, the mother, and her daughter Idella, came forward and joined them.

“You f’um de Black Belt, you says? Don’ see nothin’ lak dat dar, I be boun’!”

"Nothin' lak it," Jake responded. "Nothin'. Dem's furnaces?"

Sarah became voluble at once. This in front of them was the rolling mills; then came the coke ovens—blocks and blocks of them; off to the left lay Alice Furnace. This was Alice Quarters they were living in. . . . As she spoke, the muddy vacancy above was wakened again by the dancing pillar of light they had first seen.

"Dey's feedin' it now, honey. Dey pours in de iron 'n' coal, an' opens de chimbly. Dat's w'ut makes dat fire."

There was not much speech for the next hour. Their eyes were too busy.

"Mus' take a passel er white mens ter run dat place," Jake speculated with sudden mistrust of the neighborhood.

"Lawd bress yo' heart, man, dem's niggers does de wu'k dar. White man bosses, dat's all. My Joe he wu'ked dar 'fore he got kilt. He got burned to death in a ac-ci-dent."

"In the furnace?"

"Rollin' mill. You couldn' tell him, it burned him dat awful. His face wuz plumb

scrambled. He wuz black as coke. Comp'ny nebber paid no damages."

"Do. . . . does it usually pay damages w'en a nigger gets killed?" Dan was interested in the new valuations; in the Black Belt no one thought of paying damages for a negro.

"Off 'n' on. I wuz a plumb fool; I had a nigger lawyer, Lawyer Carmichael. You reckon any white jedge gwine ter listen to a nigger lawyer? Nex' time I gets me Judge Beavers. He's de bes' lawyer in Alabamy, come none, I hears tell. De very nex' husban' I marries an' loses in the rollin' mill, I goes straight ter Judge Beavers. . . . Dat lawyer Carmichael! We wuz to 'vide up w'utebber he got f'um de comp'ny. Wuzn' hard to 'vide up nothin'—dat's all we got. I tol' him he could 'vide up de cou't costs, I did. Rollin' mill, coke ovens, er furnace, I goes to Judge Beavers next."

The Lowes put this down as a fact to remember. There was a lot to learn about Birmingham.

"My boys gotter go to wu'k," Phoebe went on. "An' soon. I reckon dey's plenty er wu'k 'roun' here."

“Lots uv it, honey. Mo’ wu’k ’n’ anythin’ else. Dey kin git a job in de rollin’ mill. . . .”

“My boys is got ejjication,” Jake put in, concealing the pride in the utterance. “Dey wu’ks wid dey heads, dey do. Dey don’ hatter do no rollin’ mill wu’k. . . .”

After the Johnsons had faded off to bed, the newcomers held to the front porch. The clanging, bright-lit cars passed no more; the vast irregular rhythm of flare and darkness, darkness and flare, ruled the hushed night.

The problem of a livelihood for the children old enough to earn received most of the scattering talk. It was decided to ask guidance from the new neighbors, in the morning.

The boys were soon snoring healthily from the quilt pallets spread on the floor; the girls quieted in their bed. Even Phoebe dropped into an even breathing, before Jake composed himself to sleep. After a few hours he drowsed awake. He sat up suddenly, a childish terror squeezing his heart. . . . Dogs. . . . Had he heard the sound of dogs? Dogs baying in the black silence? . . . Nothing. . . . The absence of sound chilled him. Something was missing. . . . He was not in the usual place.

Then he remembered—the fight through the swamp, the days in Selma, the cluttered room in the flats of Montgomery, the railroad train up. . . . He lay back and tried to sleep. . . . Something was missing.

At last he recognized what it was. Memory filled the aching gap with the steady chorus of the swamp frogs. “Knee deep—knee deep! Better go ’round—better go ’round!” Rising and swelling, sharp call and rumbled answer shivered and broke within him. . . . “Knee deep! . . . Better go ’round! . . .” This was what he lacked. After that, he slept peacefully.

The next morning Daniel and Louis set out for the office of Lawyer Carmichael; this was the best advice Sarah Johnson could offer them. He might know of something. . . . Tom declared scornfully he would find his work for himself.

Of all the boys, Daniel had gotten most out of the years in the Black Belt negro school. He had had one winter’s start of his brothers; and, naturally serious and studious, he had absorbed everything that the place had to offer. As he and Louis swung across the

tracks at Eighteenth Street, he reflected that he could qualify as a scientific farmer, as a wheelwright, as a bookkeeper. Louis, too, had had much of this training. Surely they could find something worth while to do.

Lawyer Carmichael, in his musty office above the Magic City Billiard Parlors, was cordiality itself. He cleared a place for his legs upon a desk plastered with many coats of dusty documents and letters, and regarded them with friendly benevolence. "Why, sholy, boys, you kin fin' somethin' to do. This town's full of wu'k, for the hustler. You boys look lak hustlers. I'm a hustler myself. I ain' never had no schoolin'. I had a job sweepin' out office for ol' Judge Head, uv Tuscumbia. Judge helped me l'arn my letters, and then, when I l'arned 'em, he sot down an' taught me law hisself. I passed the bar 'xaminations, an' been practicin' for fifteen years come nex' September. I began as a cawn-fiel' nigger; now—" he reversed his legs carefully, and brushed a ravelling from his shapeless, shiny alpaca coat, "now I'm a successful practitioner in all the cou'ts uv law 'n' equity, includin' the Soopreme Cou't. An' w'ut I's done, you kin do."

Daniel listened respectfully. "We thought you might suggest some wu'k—where we might ask—"

"Sholy, sholy. Lemme see. Lemme see. W'ut kin you boys do?"

It was Daniel who answered. "Any kind of office work—I've taken bookkeepin'; an' Louis's had black-smithin', an' scientific farmin' You don' need a boy aroun' yo' office, Mr. Carmichael, do you?"

The old practitioner chuckled appreciatively. "Wan' to be a lawyer right off, hey? Listen to me, boy." He leant forward impressively. "Thar's nothin' in it, for a black man. I pays my rent; that's about all. Niggers ain' got no sense nohow; they takes all their cases to white lawyers. W'ut with a white judge 'n' a white jury, they ain' got much chance nohow. . . . Thar's nothin' in it. Besides, my own boy's all I need. He's goin' on fo'teen. . . ."

"Anything. . . . Any kin' of office wu'k. . . ."

He shook his head pityingly. "Mighty little for the black man thar. Mighty little. Man in here yestiddy says the railroad needs some hands down in Bessemer. But that's fo'teen

miles away; besides, you ain' swung a pick much, has you? . . ."

"I had hoped. . . we wanted . . ."

"Tell you what we'll do. Let's go down an' talk to Billy Reynolds. He has his own place on Sixteenth Street. Owns it. He might know uv somethin'."

Billy Reynolds proved to be the proprietor of a large lunch room, "The Agate Cafe." "He's the Gran' Master uv our lodge, he is," the lawyer whispered, as they approached the corpulent figure.

Reynolds shook his head, when the case was laid before him. "You kin try—but they ain' much doin'. Sen' 'em to the Citizens' Bank, Mistuh Carmichael, an' say I sont 'em. An you might have 'em try Smith 'n' Tatum, too—they sells real estate to people of color, boys. Then, of cou'se, there's the railroads, 'n' the furnaces. . . . But there ain' much doin'."

There was nothing doing at the Citizens' Bank, although Mr. Pennypacker, the president, was extremely courteous in turning them off. There was nothing doing at Smith & Tatum's. They received the names of half a dozen other places.

The forenoon was gone now; they spent the afternoon chasing down the further prospects.

There was nothing doing at any of the places.

The next day was Saturday, a bad day to look for work. Every car from the suburbs was crowded with rural negroes, come in to spend their wages at the billiard emporiums, the movies, and other more doubtful places of pleasure. The job-seekers gave it up early in the afternoon, resolved to start out afresh on Monday.

When they reached the house, the family was exclaiming over Tom's success. He had lazed at home on Friday, getting acquainted with the neighborhood and, in the evening, with the young men of his own age who hung out at the lunch houses along Avenue B. Saturday morning he had accompanied one of them, Chigger Ricks, to the big Morris Avenue firm where the youth worked, and had been taken on at once as porter and general utility man. He was to get nine dollars a week, and Saturday afternoons off.

"That's a real store, that is," he boasted. "McEachin an' Company—bigges' wholesale grocers on the Av'noo. We handles every-

thing. Store's bigger'n the L. 'n' N. station."

"That's great!" said Dan.

"Great's de wu'd," approved Jake. "An' Marthuly's got de promise uv a job too— Idella Johnson knowed a house on. . . . whar wuz it?"

"Quinlan Avenoo."

"Yeah, Quinlum Avenoo. She gwine ter be a general maid. 'N' yo' pappy done foun' a swell school, less dan ten blocks off, fer de gals."

"Yeah; Rena, Pheely, 'n' Pink done been entered," Phoebe announced.

"Not me."

"W'ut you mean, Rena, 'not me'?"

"I means w'ut I says. Not me. No school fer me."

"Don' you need l'arnin'—"

"I's l'arned all I needs, Paw. I'll stay at home 'n he'p maw with the cookin' 'n' washin'. I won' go to no school, so there!"

Rena was fifteen, and had quite a will of her own.

"Dat gal oughter go," Jake grumbled.

"Sho she oughter."

“Aw, let her do w’ut she wants to,” said Tom, in affluent good humor.

“I won’ go, anyhow.”

She did not.

Monday morning the footsore elder sons started out again. But the constant rebuffs had shaken their confidence. They even tried the Morris Avenue section, that afternoon—only to be told that there was nothing doing, at each office they visited—they might come back next week. . . . It was the railroads, or the furnace. . . .

The furnace was closer.

The next afternoon they crossed blocks to the office of Alice Furnace, and within half an hour were listed as furnace hands by the smooth-running corporation. They were told to report at six the next morning. Their wages would be seven-fifty a week; the hours were six to six-thirty, seven days a week, with half an hour for lunch.

“We don’ have to hol’ this long, Paw,” Daniel argued. “Jus’ till we fin’ something better.”

They found nothing better that year, or the

next. Their wages were raised at last to a dollar and a half a day; but meanwhile Tom was earning and spending his twelve a week. Tom went to work in a white collar and a fancy tie; they trudged away in overalls and lime-stained shoes. Tom dawdled away his lunch hour in one of the watermelon parlors, on the side streets, which catered to the swell negro set; Dan and Louis squatted below the vast iron stacks, and there emptied their pails of cold home-made grub. Tom was usually behind in the four a week he owed to the family treasury; Daniel, Louis, even Marthula, often paid more than their shares.

Chigger Ricks, who had helped Tom to the job, was a check-man at McEachin's; he tallied the boxes and barrels that went out on the long low drays. Tom thrived under his friendship; he became at length an under-foreman. In this capacity he directed the gangs of hands who emptied the cars drawn up on the company's side track. One of the truck-drivers, not in the bunch that ate together at the Elite or the Boston, was nevertheless a great pal of Chigger's. His name was Kimball—Snuff

Kimball, the others called him: a great hairy-faced, pit-marked yellow man.

One day Tom happened to be standing beside Chigger when Snuff came for his load. Casually Tom's eye noticed that the order on the desk called for four boxes and two barrels. Snuff rolled down three barrels, and piled five boxes on the dray, before he drove off with the initialled order. Tom caught a wink between the two others as he was leaving.

He held this within himself until lunch time.

"Say, Chigger, w'ut kin' of game you an' Snuff pullin' off?"

"Game, you lop-brained country ignoramus! W'ut de hell you mean, game?"

"I seen that order, Chigger; an' I seen w'ut Snuff put on that dray."

Chigger chuckled broadly. "You ain' such a fool, Tom. Wan' to git in on dis?"

Tom smiled open his shiny teeth. "'Bout time."

Thereafter he was one of the group. The gang—there were two others in it, he learned,—a driver, Mule White, and a quiet little check-man named Hays, who was an officer of the

lodge and a deacon in the Mt. Sinai Baptist congregation—had the thing all worked out. They took only from full car loads, and then they were careful that at least one outside employee was responsible with them for the delivery. By the time the car had been emptied, it was impossible to ascertain where the leak occurred, if it was discovered. The goods they succeeded in stealing were sold below the market rate to any one of several Italian grocers in the crowded part of the city; and the five shared the money. No one had gotten caught yet; the firm could afford to lose this little, anyway.

Late one afternoon Ricks took the tally for another check-man, and pushed out an extra box of canned tomatoes. Mule White was to get this load. The great fireproof door rattled, as the courthouse clock struck five.

“All clear?” Mr. Brooks, the superintendent, called.

Chigger, serene in the confidence that White would drive up in a minute, and that another man had signed the slip anyway, gave the signal for the door to come down. He waited outside with the boxes.

It was another dray that drew up. The drayman, a slow, stupid newcomer, explained that White had been sent to pick up an order delivered by mistake, and that he was to take this final load.

Unostentatiously Chigger slid the fourth box behind him, and sent off the dray with three. Here was a mess! The warehouse closed in the rear, his coat inside, White off no one knew where. . . .

He saw a way. He trundled the heavy box to the end of the platform, eased it to the ground, and, at the end of the building, slid it through a rotted planking in the big fence. It toppled over on its side. There it could lie until one of the gang could call for it.

When he left the rear door, Mr. Brooks walked into his office, pulled down the roll top of his desk, slammed the office door, and started down First Avenue toward the Twenty-first Street Bridge. An unusual noise toward the rear of the warehouse reached him. He looked down the weedy vacant lot, and saw the box of goods mysteriously balance on the timber by the hole in the fence, and fall inside.

At once he sized up the situation. For some

weeks he had been looking for this very thing. Stopping in the next store, he called up City Hall, and asked headquarters to send a couple of detectives on the run.

Chigger Ricks slid around the next corner, and into the warehouse, while the telephoning was going on. He put on his coat and hat, and hurried away. Tom, he knew, was waiting for him at the Elite.

“Here’s de debbil! Dat fool Mule White ain’ turned up, an’ me wid dat box uv tommy-toes locked outside!”

“W’ut did you do, man?”

Chigger explained his expedient. “Now we gotter fin’ Mule an’ let him go fer it.”

Tom’s eyes narrowed. “Tell you w’ut. Them other niggers ain’ in on this box. Why split with them? I’ll pick up a dray, come back an’ get that box myself, an’ sell it to Tony. Then me ’n’ you jus’ divides with each other.”

Tom came back with a rattly wagon pulled by a one-eyed mule, and driven by a simple one-eyed driver, Shuck Simmons. Belle, the mule, had been a mine mule in her day; a powder explosion had blotted out her right eye. Shuck’s

left orb had been wrong, from birth, a ghastly, dim sketch of an eye, no use whatever for sight.

"My right an' Belle's lef' makes a team," he always explained.

Tom and Shuck called for the box, and received instead a welcome from the detectives. Under this chaperonage, Shuck drove down to City Hall; and he and Tom spent the night in the negro cage, a three-tier barred barracks. Tom was held for pretty larceny; Shuck, deprived of the two bits he had been promised for hauling a box a few blocks, was detained as a witness, and on the charge of being accessory before the fact to a misdemeanor. When he heard this read in court, he shook his head dolefully; it sounded like life.

Tom had parted with a dollar to have a message smuggled to old Jake. Sure enough, before ten o'clock next morning Jake arrived with a young clerk from Judge Beaver's office; no Lawyer Carmichaels this time! On the lawyer's advice, Tom pleaded guilty, and threw himself on the mercy of the recorder as a first offender. . . .

Thirty days in the chain gang.

The chain gang! They knew it from Black

Belt days. No Lowe had yet been degraded to its clanking disgrace. Tom served out his term, driving a pick into the hard Jefferson County roads, his feet chained to a row of neighbors, under the watchful eye of a white man with an ever-ready automatic. Phoebe became a plague at the warden's office, seeking the route of the enforced toilers. Whenever she could locate them, she appeared with a pail of more appetizing lunch than the city thought of giving to its fallen sons, or than she assembled for Daniel and Louis.

When he returned home, job gone, feet chafed and sore, body sickened and infested with itching things, Jake had no word of reproof. He referred to the matter only to Phoebe. "Two boys in de furnace, one a jail-bird, one gal wu'kin' out an' de nex' chasin' atter boys. . . . I reckon it'll hatter be Pheely 'n' Pink's gotter fin' dis 'mancipation. . . ."

"Yeah."

"It ain' so easy to fin', in Bummin'-ham. . . ."

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE MAN'S LAW

“**A**W, give us a cawn pone, Louis,” wheedled “Chickenbone” Scott, for the third time. The hands and helpers lay in the swelter of the vast, pot-bellied furnace, on a bed of warm cinders, munching their cold home snacks. It was cool outside; but the first helper had eaten here, the day Alice Furnace was first fired; and the last would not depart from the hallowed custom.

“Give you nothin’,” grunted Louis, ostentatiously smacking his lips. “Some niggers is too ornery to tote their own victuals. . . .” He finished the last pone, and licked the short crumbs from the brown paper.

“You wouldn’ min’ seein’ me stahve,” complained the small helper.

“Not a mite. Too lazy to victual yo’self—”

“Warn’t nothin’ to bring.”

“There never is,” said Dan, “to believe you, Bonaparte.”

“Thankey, thankey, Dan,” a wide grin greeted the welcome bread and the ungracious words. “De Lawd’ll—”

“Reward de damn fool dat listens to you,” Chiz Pennypacker completed. Pennypacker was “sittin’-in” the lunch time with the workers; he sold real estate and Ford cars, when he permitted himself to work; but it was good to laze with a group of fellow-lodge-members, who respected his shrewd retellings of commercial trickeries, invariably bent so that their limelight was cast on the narrator. “It is hotter ’n hell here.”

He turned his eyes to the hot flame of the opened furnace, where half-naked workers were clearing the way for a run. The ponderous iron gate lifted, the living flood of luminous metal shouldered out, down the incline to the shaped sand sow, and then quickly into the moulds for the pigs. There was a breathless running to and fro, a shutting of channels, an ordered disorder. The gate closed, the gray-ing metal slid sluggishly to the last form. “Hotter ’n hell,” he repeated unctuously.

"We'll be used to the place, when it comes," Dan remarked idly.

Pennypacker nodded. "It's hell for the niggers, all right." His fascinated eyes watched the massive forms glistening in the red glow, as it played upon huge knotted muscles, grown to fit each motion of shovel or scoop.

"Oh, well, mout be worse," adjudged Louis. Chickenbone looked at him witheringly. "De hell it mout!"

"True words, son. Las' night I hearn Gawge Adams speechifyin' 'bout us'ns votin'." His voice dropped to a whisper; you never could tell when a white overseer might slip up behind, and overhear; and there were themes that were treason.

"He gwineter git elected?" asked old Mose Backus, a grizzled helper who had started with the furnace, and seemed toughened enough to outlast it.

"Not fer dat," explained Pennypacker. "He'll git 'lected 'cause he's shooiken de hand uv ev'y farmer in de distric', an' slobbered over ev'y kid. But—he still talks it."

"Hm," grunted Dan. He might have meant a hundred things by it; if his slow brain could

have counted them, he would have found that he did.

"I wuz talkin' wid him yestiddy," continued the well-dressed drone, concealing his pride in the simple fact. "'How far do you niggers want?' he axed me. 'Equality?'" There was a sudden glitter in his eyes at the word.

Each hearer felt his muscles tighten, his heart quickstep. Louis looked guiltily around; no one was in ear's-length.

"Whaddid you tell 'im?" asked Dan, in casual tones, to hide his share of the agitation.

"W'ut could I tell 'im? I sez, no; I sez, us don' wan' no equality; I sez, all us wants is de vote."

"Dat's talkin'," glowed Mose.

"Yeah," repeated Daniel. "That was right. Yeah. Not . . . equality."

"No, suh." Mose's delighted negative was an affirmation. "We ain' lookin' fer ee-quality. Not dis time; not dis time."

His voice trembled as he pronounced the dread word: his eye gleamed, and his back straightened, at the Utopian shibboleth, bright with a light that never was on land or sea or sky, and never will be.

"Comin' to lodge tonight?" inquired the visitor carelessly.

"Aimin' to."

"Whenever we're on day shift, we're there," responded Louis.

"I thought it was Choosday," Dan worried.

"Man, you don' know one day f'um another! An' Sattiday tomorrow!"

"Yeah," Dan's assent was spiritless. The dull grind of the years had erased the passage of time: the days, the months, the seasons, were one aching and indistinguishable blur.

"Well, see yer tonight." All rose at the wailing screech of the whistle. Chiz patted his creased trousers appreciatively. "See yer tonight."

"S'long."

The workers slouched back to their transmuting crucible; the great iron alchemist,—this alchemist, that turned with its hot magic their hours, their bodies, into lofty piles of pig metal, which shifted by trade's magic into chuckling gold and swollen dividends,—gulped them into its roomy maw.

Night was their release from the long strain of the fourteen-hour shift; and after a hasty

supper, and a hastier dusting-off, Dan and Louis joined Jake on the porch, and the three set off for the lodge. Phoebe and even Marthula also belonged to the Sons and Daughters of Ancient Galilean Fishermen; but lodge nights proper were barred to the womenfolk.

At a quarter after eight, the Supreme Exalted Master thwacked with his wooden hammer on the splintered pine desk, and the brethren settled themselves in the diamond-shaped array of chairs.

"We will be led in prayer by Brudder Reynolds, Pas' Soopreme Gran' Keeper uv de Nets," announced the leader.

Brother Reynolds prayed with business-like fervor all over Jefferson County, the state, the South, the nation. He ended with a special petition for the nervy white man who had been sent to Washington, "de Abraham Linkum uv Bummin'ham, w'ut's bringin' 'mancipation ter de cullud race."

"Amen!"

"Lawd bless 'im!"

From every corner the fervent chorus rose, together with groans equally fervent. The lodge was not at one on the matter.

“Brudder Sharp, h’ist de chune,” commanded the presiding officer.

“I’s Gwineter Be Ready” shook and trembled in the breathing glimmer; “I’s Troubled in My Mind” mounted and descended in rhythmic insistency. There were seventy-five in the room; and they sang seventy-five different parts, in a strange and impressive harmony, that swelled and shivered, until the building trembled, and the roof bent upward.

“Take All the World, but Leave Me Jesus” was reached at last. This came with deep feeling. Brother Pennypacker, the banker, who had built and owned the seven-story steel “skyscraper” the bank occupied, sang this with cold precision. But the great flock of souls, who had seen the white man take most of the world, and gladly surrender Jesus to them, poured themselves into the words of distant promise.

“Brudder Kirkman will address uv us upon ‘De Sartinty uv Fraternity,’” oracularly announced the chair.

The Reverend Elisha Kirkman, shepherd of the Baptist flock to which the Lowes belonged, rose to get in his word. He had seen slavery, as Jake had; he came from up Tuscumbia way.

He was weazened and sharp-tongued and wise; he had no love for shams; black and white feared the sting that hung in his words. It did not take him long to pass from cloudy talk of brotherhood to the nearer theme of the vote.

“Gawge Adams’ gwineter git ’lected, bekaze de Lawd’s wu’ds is speakin’ th’ough him,” uttered the preacher, less in a shout than in a crouching, powerful whisper. “Registration Day’s comin’ fas’; an’ dat’s gwineter be de crossin’ uv de Red Sea uv tribulation, an’ de end uv de black man’s long expostulation in de wilderness uv sin . . . an’ slavery . . . an’ disfranchisin’.”

“Hit’s erbout time.” Billy Reynolds lifted himself out of his chair with difficulty. He was noted as a stirrer-up of activity, which his unwieldy frame forbade him to share. “Dis yere lodge oughter march up to dem registration men, an’ deman’ our rights in a body.”

“Better stay out dan git th’owed out,” mumbled Bone Scott, one of the youngest members.

Jake rose to his feet cautiously. “Brudder Cheerman—”

“Brudder Jacob Lowe am on de flooah.”

“I don’ favor no buttin’ into no white folk-

ses' business, I don't, Brudder Cheerman." The words were hunched out one by one; Jake was impressive, when he did speak. "'Ligion am fer white an' black; Good Book sez, 'I come ter de sheep an' de goats.' Is I right?"

"Sho'ly, brudder."

". . . Amen!"

"Law book don' say nothin' 'bout sheep er goats; don' say nothin' 'bout black men med-dlin' wid dis votin'. Is I right?"

"Amen!"

"You is plumb wrong." Billy Reynolds' tones carried a lash. "Yo' argyments is sho' slopsided. You ain' read all dem law books, lak I is, I be boun'."

"Kain' read nothin'."

"You shows it. Law books sez de man uv color kin vote. Ax Lawyer Carmichael dar. Jes' ax him."

The wordy lawyer took the cue, and launched forth upon a wordy sea: there was talk of state and national laws, habeas corpus, and other gruesome secrets which meant nothing to Jake. He would not listen. He turned instead to Dan. Dan would know.

"Dem law books say we all kin vote?"

“That they do, paw. That’s been the law for forty . . . fifty years.”

“Don’ dat beat bob-tail! Heah I ain’ nebber knowed it. Law book sez dat, huh? Aw right. You sez it, Dan. I’m fer it.”

“Dar, now,” irrepressible Billy Reynolds took the floor bodily from the startled lawyer, whose mouth hung open as he collapsed into his chair. “Brudder Jake’s done seed de light. Dat’s de sperrit, brudder. Dar wuz a man on de side track; he done switch over to de main line now. In cou’s e it’s in de law books. An’ dat ain’ all. Men uv color does vote. You all knows dat. Mo’ dan two hundred votes in Alabama by itself. Is I right, Brudder Carmichael? I is. Who is dey? ’Publicans, dat’s w’ut dey is. Scripchers calls ’em ‘Publicans an’ sinners.’ Dey b’longs to de ‘Publican Party. Me—I don’. I’s a Demmycrat, I is. Ef dey lets de ‘Publicans vote—mail carriers, ’n’ men uv color w’ut wu’ks—when de sperrit strikes ’em—aroun’ de Pos’ Office—why don’ dey let us Demmycrats vote? Dat’s w’ut I axes.”

Brother Elisha Kirkman stretched his angu-

lar form up to its knobby height. His gaze travelled inscrutably around the room. The brothers knew that glance; it made them twitch in discomfort in their seats. Something disagreeable was coming—some truth, harsh as is the way of truth.

“Bruddren, Brudder Reynolds wants to vote Demmycrat, he does. An’ I speaks a parryble unto you. A certain man went down f’um Jeroozalem to Bummin’ham. An’ certain thieves did strip ’n’ rob him. An’ dey lef’ him naked, an’ dey lef’ him hungry, an’ dey lef’ him thirstin’. Dey lef’ him wid nothin’ but one thin cotton undershirt. An’ dey call dat undershirt de vote. ’N’ he says, ‘I don’ vote fer no Samaritan,’ he says, ‘’n’ I don’ vote fer no priests ’n’ Levites,’ he says, ‘’n’ I don’ vote fer no ’Publicans er Independents,’ he says. . . . ‘Me’, he says, ‘I votes fer dem thieves w’ut done rob me.’ Dem as has ears, let ’em hear.”

A broad, raucous, uncomprehending laugh started abruptly, then stopped. The rest sat in puzzled silence. This smacked of treason; they were not prepared to make the most of it.

"I don' know 'bout dis parryble business, but I moves dat de lodge tries out de vote nex' registerin' day."

"Yeah, le's try hit out—"

i "An' git th'owed out, I says."

"We don' have to tell nobody nothin', brudder."

"De motion am amended," ruled the Supreme Exalted Master, "dat dis votin' is to be did precisely on de q. t."

"Da's right."

"Dat's talkin'."

"En' I moves you," declaimed Brother Kirkman, "dat de brudder w'ut tells a stranger be fined one dollar an' six bits."

"'N' ef he tells his wife, to be suspelled f'um de lodge permanent."

"De motion am moved an' carried. If dey ain' no udder business, dar's beer in de ice-chest. Members will please restrain deyselves to one bottle ontill ev'y member is had his'n."

Over the lukewarm beer they planned groups who were to go up to the Courthouse together, and attempt to register.

"Count me out," insisted Jake.

"You's for it—"

“Cain’ run lak I useter.”

Dan and Louis, Chiz Pennypacker and Jim Ricks made one party. The banker tried to dissuade his son. “Nigger’s well enough off as it is, Chiz. Better keep yo’ hoof outside dat cou’t-house.”

“Naw sir, dad. Me ’n’ my Ford’s goin’ to take dat trip togedder.”

Pursuant to the plan decided upon, on a Tuesday morning four days later—the Lowes were on the night shift this week—the four men collected at the Agate Lunch shortly after eight.

“You boys stan’ on yo’ rights,” Billy Reynolds godsped them. “If Dan an’ Chiz can’t teach dem white folks nothin’—”

They walked briskly up Third Avenue. When they crossed Twenty-first, and the long formidable stone steps were before them, they slowed down.

“We’re early,” Dan palliated. “No need to hustle.”

“All de better.”

Heavily lettered signs pointed to the Circuit Courtroom, where the board was to meet.

“Dis way,” Chiz directed the others importantly.

They took seats on the first row. The room was empty. A few white men straggled in. These did not notice the intruders.

“Here dey are,” came in impressive whispering. Young Pennypacker, through his real estate dealings, had become familiar with the habitués of the seat of county government. He pointed out the commissioners in voluble explanation. “Him in front—dat’s Mistuh R. E. L. Gwin, wid de funny little moustache. A farmer f’um Dolomite. Can’t read, dey say. . . . Dat un’s Mistuh Rice, f’um Adger, another farmer. . . .”

“Who’s the old gentleman?”

“Mus’ be Mistuh Turnipseed. Got stores at Cardiff ’n’ Belle Ellen. Dat fat un—you seen him befo’, ain’ you?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“You know, he wuz on de jury sent Tom to de chain-gang. Dat’s ‘Buttermilk’ Chivers. He ’n’ lawyer Glass, dat scrunched-up little thing in de corner, never done a lick uv wu’k. Dey belongs to dis Cou’t-house ring dey talks about.”

“They don’t look right bright.”

“My dad’s got mo’ brains ’n’ all uv ’em to-gedder.”

The four negroes were first in line, when the big books were opened. Mr. Chivers waved them grandly aside. “Keep in line, there. These gentlemen are ahead of you. . . .”

The gentlemen were white—farmers, mainly, from Toadvine and McCalla, Refuge and Trussville: men who made a cross over their names in the big record book. One by one they came up, and departed.

“Keep in line, you. . . . These gentlemen are ahead. . . .”

So it went all the morning. At length the commissioners adjourned for lunch. The negroes still had not been reached—neither this four, nor others packed just behind the railing.

Dan’s face had grown a shade darker. “We stays here. . . . They’ll have to reach us sometime.”

Lunch apparently softened the adamant Anglo-Saxon breasts. Chivers, as if by a pre-arranged plan, called over the first of the four at once. It was Ricks, brother to that Chigger

Ricks who had worked with Tom—a good-natured boy, without much sense.

“What you want, nigger?”

“Wants to vote, suh.”

“This ain’t election day. Move on.”

Ricks hung on to his place. “Us wants to get registered f’ust.”

The white man pushed over a volume of the Criminal Code, opening it at random. “Read this, nigger.”

Ricks struggled through the first few sentences.

“‘Read’ means ‘read fas’.’ I bet they call you Chain Lightnin’, boy.” This drew a few guffaws. “The law says you don’ know enough to vote. Move on. You, there.”

Dan stood humbly before the railing.

“Yo’ grandfather didn’t vote in 1860, did he?”

There was an appreciative snicker at lawyer Glass’s wit.

“No, suh.”

“Read an’ write?”

“Yes, suh.”

“An’ they ain’ put you in jail for it? Here, read this. . . .”

Daniel covered it accurately, and quickly. The commissioners looked nonplussed; their heads clicked together.

“Law says you gotter know the Constitution uv the Newnited States by heart. Can you say it?”

Daniel's jaw sagged. This was more than he had bargained for. . . . “Law says that, suh?”

“Yo' ears bad, nigger?”

“No, suh.”

“Well—”

They all leaned back to enjoy the joke. Daniel stood dreadfully alone, his throat working. His eyes did not fall. “I knows it, suh. I kin say it.”

Their eyes widened. Turnipseed recovered first. “Say it, then.”

Desperately Daniel set his memory to work. He gripped the railing to steady his nerves and his voice, wet his dried lips, and began to declaim: “Fo'score . . . fo'score an' seven years ago our father . . . our fathers brought fo'th a new nation, conceived in libbity, an' dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are . . . we are en-

gaged in a great civil war, testin' whether that nation, or any nation so conceived an' so dedicated, can long endure. We are met . . ."

His voice droned on, in the stilled room. The noises from the busy street without slipped in, were conscious of their intrusion, slipped out again. Only the wheezy breathing of Old Man Turnipseed punctuated the solemn pauses.

The last rounded words of the great emancipator marched out: ". . . that a government uv the people, by the people, an' for the people, shall not perish from the earth. . . ."

Toward the end his voice gained certainty and volume. It was all that the negroes could do to keep from breaking into cheers, as his tones hushed to a lingering and disturbing echo. Daniel, inwardly proud, stood humbly still at the railing.

"I'm damned," Chivers half apologized. "I didn' think you knew it. . . . I didn' think any nigger knew it."

"I learned it at school."

There was more consultation among the arbiters of manhood's highest right. Chivers and Turnipseed were convinced; but the other three stood firm.

"How long you lived in Alabamy?"

"All my life, suh."

"How long in Jefferson County?"

"'Bout five years."

"Law says ten. Come back five years f'um now, an' try again."

Chisholm Pennypacker pushed forward. "I live here all my life," he urged.

"That's too long." Glass's tone was pitying. "Law says ten years. . . . Nex'!"

"Well," Jim Ricks observed gratefully as they recrossed Twenty-first Street, "us didn' get th'owed out, anyhow. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

SHORT AND SIMPLE

ON the night when Dan and Louis retold the happenings at the Court House to Jake and the family, Tom had dropped by and stayed to supper—a thing rare with him.

“That’s all yo’ Galilean Fishermen kin do,” he scoffed. “Sont you to the cou’t-house—ter vote!”

“Well, yo’ lodge—”

“Don’ you say nothin’ ’bout the Sons and Daughters of the Rising Glory, sonny. W’ut you don’ know ’bout us! We’re a live bunch, we are. . . . Ter vote!”

Tom had formerly been one of the Ancient Fisherman; but the lure of the new lodge, dedicated to the turkêy-trot and consecrated to the chitterling party, had captured his light fancy.

“A bunch uv colored sports . . . billiard sharps. . . .”

“Look w’ut they do for you! I been in jail since I saw you. . . .”

“Son!”

“’Twasn’ nothin’. The lodge wuz havin’ a dance, an’ the deppity sheriffs jugged us all. ‘Disawderly conduc’! Huh! Spent a night in the county jail, an’ got fined a dollar an’ costs. I pays where I goes; they couldn’ keep me in. But I didn’ have quite enough. The lodge treasurer loaned me the money. He didn’ have enough for all the Risin’ Glories, though, to pay their six dollars an’ a half; some of ’em put in two weeks in the calaboose.”

“You said . . . one dollar—”

“An’ costs. Don’ forget them costs.”

“Huccome dey so much costs?” Jake’s mind worked slowly at times.

“Ain’ them deppities gotter live?”

Daniel roused himself; he looked with great disfavor upon Tom’s uncertain method of livelihood. “They haven’t caught you yet around the depot, have they?”

“Meanin’ what?”

“Freight cars aren’t watched very well, are they, Tom?”

“Aw, you make me sick! Yo’ mouth always leakin’—”

“Yo’ bunch was busy there las’ Sattiday night, wuzn’t it? Chigger Ricks tol’ me—”

“He tol’ you nothin’.”

Jake crossed his legs noisily. “You been robbin’ freight cars, son?”

“My record’s clear as whey. They ain’ never caught me at nothin’.”

“Well, that’s all right. . . .”

Little Pink had listened carefully; an impish grin was on his face. “I caught that Jerry Harper huggin’ ’Thuly on the front po’ch last night.”

“You didn’t no such! I’ll box yo’ ears—”

“Did so!”

“’Thuly playin’ aroun’ too, eh?”

“Now, Tom!”

“Oh, it’s good for you. Only . . . be keerful.”

“Dat’s right,” Jake nodded oracularly.

“Us gotter be keerful, all de time. . . .”

“Come on, Louis—you said you’d walk a piece with me?” Tom’s tones were casual.

“Ain’t you goin’ to work?” Dan demanded.

"I'm takin' tonight off," with a resentful look at Dan.

"It's yo' funeral."

"Aw ready, Tom."

As they approached the boarding house where Chigger Ricks stayed, Tom spoke under his breath. "You keep yo' mouf shut, if we lets you come along?"

"You know I will."

When they reached the rear room, the ivories were tumbling merrily. Chigger, Mule White, two or three boys dressed as flashily as Tom, leaned over the table, crooning their endearing commands to the dancing dice. Dimes, quarters, changed hands bewilderingly. Louis' hand, jingling a sparse pocketful of change, itched and hungered. They did not ask him to join.

After an hour, the party rolled up to a dance hall. Louis never felt quite one of the glittering company his brother kept; he was something of a trousered wall flower tonight. But he enjoyed himself. . . . Quality negroes . . . he was rising to his proper level.

The jazzing syncopaters tooted the final variations of "Home Sweet Home"; the high

steppers crushed down the narrow stairs. Six men walked up the silent street together. At the Twenty-first Street bridge they turned down to the side, after making sure that no watchful figure in blue was in sight. Here, in the gloom of the arching iron-work, they sat down to rest and consult.

“Ole Cap’n Thigpen’s rheumatiz is wuss’n ever,” Butt Collier gloated. “He limped erroun’ all day. Couldn’ catch a measle.”

After a long wait—it was three hours after midnight—two of the men strolled back to the bridge’s level; their feet could be heard echoing away toward the Twenty-fourth Street grade crossing. Louis, Butt, Tom, and Chigger crouched their way beneath the vast shadowing viaduct.

After they had covered two blocks, the group separated. Butt and Louis slipped over the low railroad fence, and walked across the tracks toward Morris Avenue.

“Here—you stay here,” Butt admonished at last. He stuck a heavy old forty-four into Louis’ hands. “One whistle if it’s de Cap’n—two for anybody else. Keep yo’ eye peeled, now. . . .”

He dissolved in the gray shadows toward the north.

From his post Louis could see the watchman's shelter, its window outlined in yellow against the darkness. The red and green lanterns at the switches and on the silent cars caught his fancy. He gave up trying to count them; they stretched, smaller and smaller, off to the sleeping east.

Three or four times he shifted his cramped position. An hour passed; he feared it was almost daylight. There was not a sound to disturb the quiet, except the passage twice of a puffing, overloaded freight, rolling toward the far gulf.

A thin whistle from the distance woke his drowsiness. . . . Another. . . . Remembering instructions, he faded quietly toward Avenue A, slipped up beside the bridge, and took a roundabout way to Chigger's room.

He did not enter until he had seen several of the others go in. He found them sliding heavy paper-wrapped bundles under the bed.

"Silk," Tom grinned. "More'n we could tote."

"What was the whistling for?"

“Car full of cops crossin’ to the Red Light district. . . . Gee, it’s a cinch to be a cop!”

Louis did not get much sleep that night. Neither did his sister, Rena. The boy slipped in at daybreak without comment. A little later the granddaughter came in. Phoebe said nothing to her; but the old woman’s straight look pursued the girl all the ensuing day. When Phoebe was not looking, the younger woman tossed her head scornfully. She gave no explanation: there was no one to compel one.

This was not the first time. The old negress put two and two together, as a result of gossip she had heard, and made six or seven out of it, as is the agelong fashion of mothers.

“Reny,” she said finally. “You’re aimin’ fer trouble. Playin’ ’roun’ wid dem Cross boys, an’ Charley Battle. . . .”

“Who says I plays aroun’ with ’em?”

“I says so. If I ever kotch you foolin’ wid dem, I’ll tan de hide off’n you, dat I will.”

“Who’s goin’ to hol’ me, while you do? I ain’ nailed down to this floor.”

“If I ever kotch you—”

“You won’ catch me foolin’ with no boys.”

There was sauciness in the whole attitude.

Nor did Phoebe ever catch her. These boys were too young, after all, she concluded. There were older boys . . . men . . . Adventures came without her seeking. There was that driver for a South Highland grocery, who noticed her trim windwhipped shape, as she waited for a car. "Want a lift?"

She held the reins while he made a few deliveries; and he held the reins as he guided into the swampy undeveloped parkland at the head of South Fifteenth Street. "Big Bull" she called him; the name had fitted, during the spicy weeks that followed.

Then the man's wife, who lived on Brown's Hill, learned of the affair. Obliging neighbors told her even the number of the house they occasionally visited. She paid them an unexpected call. There was no breath wasted in salutation. During the rough and tumble fight that followed, "Big Bull" stood by as meekly as a sick lamb. Rena took a good clawing; and as the triumphant spouse turned to deal with her husband, he vanished without a word. Rena, sniffing bloodily at the window, saw the couple round the corner, "Big Bull"

a good twenty feet ahead, and gaining. . . .

Well, it had been fun while it lasted.

There were many others. There were, too, the white boys who lived in the houses above the negro quarters—the Avenue E gang, the Thirteenth Street Rounders, even a few of the tougher Idlewild boys. These had caches of stones ready for the negro boy who ventured into their exclusive, poverty-ridden bailiwick; but there was a different welcome for a comely colored girl. Rena was much lighter than Marthula; just as little Pheely, in turn, was almost white. Rena had been a little ashamed of this, in the Institute in the Black Belt: ashamed, and inwardly proud. There were vague taunts about doings at the Clopton place, even after her grandma had married Jake. As she grew older, she lost all sense of shame. The light skin came in handy at times.

From these white boys Rena learned much; and especially that, in some things, there was little difference between white and black. . . .

If Phoebe remained ignorant of these gipsyings, more observant neighbors did not. "You's a fool, gal," a genial lodging-house keeper a block away, who had taken a fancy

to her, once told her. "Foolin' erroun' de way you do. . . . Cop'll catch you; den you gets sont up fer fragrancy. Six months! Why'n'cher go in business?"

"Jus' how?"

"You slide over to Maggie Ellis's. She'll show you."

"Hmm. . . . Twenty-fou'th?"

"Twenty-thu'd an' Alley B. You got looks, gal. She'll treat you white. . . . You ought to pull down twenty a week, any day."

Rena wondered. After all, it was a good, steady livelihood; and Marthula proud of her four a week! She wouldn't always have the looks. . . . Nor the pep. . . . She'd take one squint at the house, anyway. . . .

She sauntered over, her hazy determination refusing to go beyond this. The madame, a shrewd-faced yellow woman in her early forties, tolled her in from the fence, and appraised her aloud. "You look healthy. . . . Twenty-three, you say?"

Unblushingly the girl added the four years to her age.

"I'll give you a try-out. . . . Remember, we don' have no nigger men here: not in wu'k-

in' hours. I don' care w'ut you does in yo' own time. . . . We caters to quality. . . ."

Rena recalled that, as far as her observations went, there was little difference between the white and the black; except that the white usually had more money. She subsided into the nocturnal routine of the place.

She did not make twenty a week, or even half of twenty. Maggie saw to that. But she did have a comfortable room to sleep off her mornings, and "genu-wine silk stockin's," and other things, some of which she had dreamed about, and some of which she had not. All in all, she was highly contented. Most of the time she was in good health; and that was a lot.

"Big Bull" turned up after a time; and his termagant spouse never called again. Why, Rena even had a negro maid to wait on her. She was quality, now!

If Rena trod a broad and sloping path, Marthula found her way straight and very uneven. This was chiefly because Jerry Harper, who portered for Houseman and Freeman, did not earn enough to marry on. In fact, he was not sure he wanted to marry.

“Too easy to pick up a ’ooman, honey. W’ut fer I wants to git tied up wid matter-mony?”

“Cause uv me, I reckon,” she giggled, coquettishly.

He led her back to the ice-cream counter, for this brilliant sally. There was no place finer than Liberty Park, he boasted; why, East Lake, or Luna Park in Pensacola, wasn’t in a class with it. . . . They tried again the heart-lifting mystery of the roller coaster; and, at the convenient dark tunnel, he again took toll from willing lips.

“Us’n’s don’ need no preacher ter sanctify us, do us, honey?”

“N . . . no.”

There came a time when Marthula changed her answer. “Jerry, we gotter get married now because . . . because . . .”

He chuckled at her whisper. “You has de say, honeysuckle. Married it is.”

The next three weeks were hectic with preparation. But the result was worth every bit of it. As Marthula rustled out of a real carriage into Brother Kirkham’s little room at the end of the vestibule of Carmel Baptist

Church, she caught one glimpse of the thronged aisles, below the massed pallor of clematis and smilax behind the pulpit. Her skin tingled, her heart thumped oddly, she shivered in the lamp-lit dusk of the room. Even Phoebe's Sunday-dressed form was unreal. . . . Tears broke through the shell, as she nestled her head against the grandmother.

The happy groom stood as far from her as one small room permitted. His brows were knotted over the impossible task of making the buttonhole on his white kid gloves slip over the button. Those gloves were never meant for a hand grown great hoisting feed boxes. . . .

The organ . . . the music . . . the wedding march! Not quite the stately processional Mr. Mendelssohn wrote; the first three climbing notes hesitated, syncopated, mounted to a jovial ragtime jubilee. That was Mark Kirkman at the keys; smiles lightened the faces in the little room, as the familiar broken rapture ragged on. There was nothing Mark could not, and did not, play: he was a king on the church organ, he was emperor on the tinny keys at Maggie Ellis's. Night after night he would drop in

and weave "Dixie" and "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" into a fantasy as entrancing as the "Pensacola Blues." As Marthula swung out on the aisle, safely clutched on Jake's arm, she saw first of all Mark's bent head, whispering to his keys, teasing and bullying melody out of them.

Up the aisle she swished, her feet breaking out into little ripples of syncopation. Miss' Mims, her employer, had contributed the cream wedding gown. Miss' Johnson, who lived next door in the quarters, had insisted on donating her own wedding veil, of soft and creamy lace. Jake's stiff white shirt framed a gorgeous red tie, the gift of old Judge Lowe, saved through the years for such momentous ceremonies; and Jerry, in a new brown suit, with checks as big as his hands, looked as elegant as a dish of ice-cream on a car-card.

Brother Kirkman coughed profoundly. Ensued a silence so deep that a pin could hear itself begin to drop. The solemn service droned on. Little Ted Mims, who sat on the first seat with his sister and the nurse, became so excited watching cook's new dress that he fell forward,

butting an already snub nose into the frayed matting. Nurse got him back again; he did not even let out one whimper.

“Do you take . . .” Mumble, mumble . . .

“I do.”

“Amen!”

“Whom Gawd hath joined togedder. . . .”

“Bless de Lawd!”

“. . . Amen!”

The march out, the party afterward at the house on Scratch Ankle, passed like a sweet disordered dream to Marthula and the delighted husband. All the Avenue B neighbors were there; oh, folks from everywhere. They hardly noticed that Tom had not come; of course, Rena was not expected. The newmated couple could not be persuaded to leave before the crowd. They escorted the last lingerers to the door; Marthula wept once more on Phoebe's calicoed shoulder, then waved a good-bye from the Loop car. The trolley clanged away, bearing her from the dark group in the street, silhouetted against the perpetual glare of the furnace.

The ride home was rich with soft whispers of the future. Jerry, nevertheless, remembered to ring at Tenth Avenue, a block before Quinlan

was reached. The conductor failed to stop at their signal, and ran half a block down the hill, to Humboldt, before they could get off. They walked wearily back up the dark hill, and so to their own home.

The light clicked on. Around them were the lovely presents—the phonograph, the dinner set of a hundred and nineteen pieces, the barrel of flour from Houseman & Freeman. Jerry tinkered with the phonograph, and aimlessly started “My Old Kentucky Home.” He slipped off this record half way through, and let “Snuggle Up a Little Closer” set the mood. Smiling into his wife’s brown eyes, he clicked off the light.

A belated motor climbed the hill with clutch open, then hummed away to the south. The hill was at length quiet; although two panting hearts were not. A rapture as old as Eden made the room its own.

Marthula had not forgotten to set the new alarm clock.

“Roll out uv bed, black boy; I’ve got coffee ‘n’ hoecakes ready.”

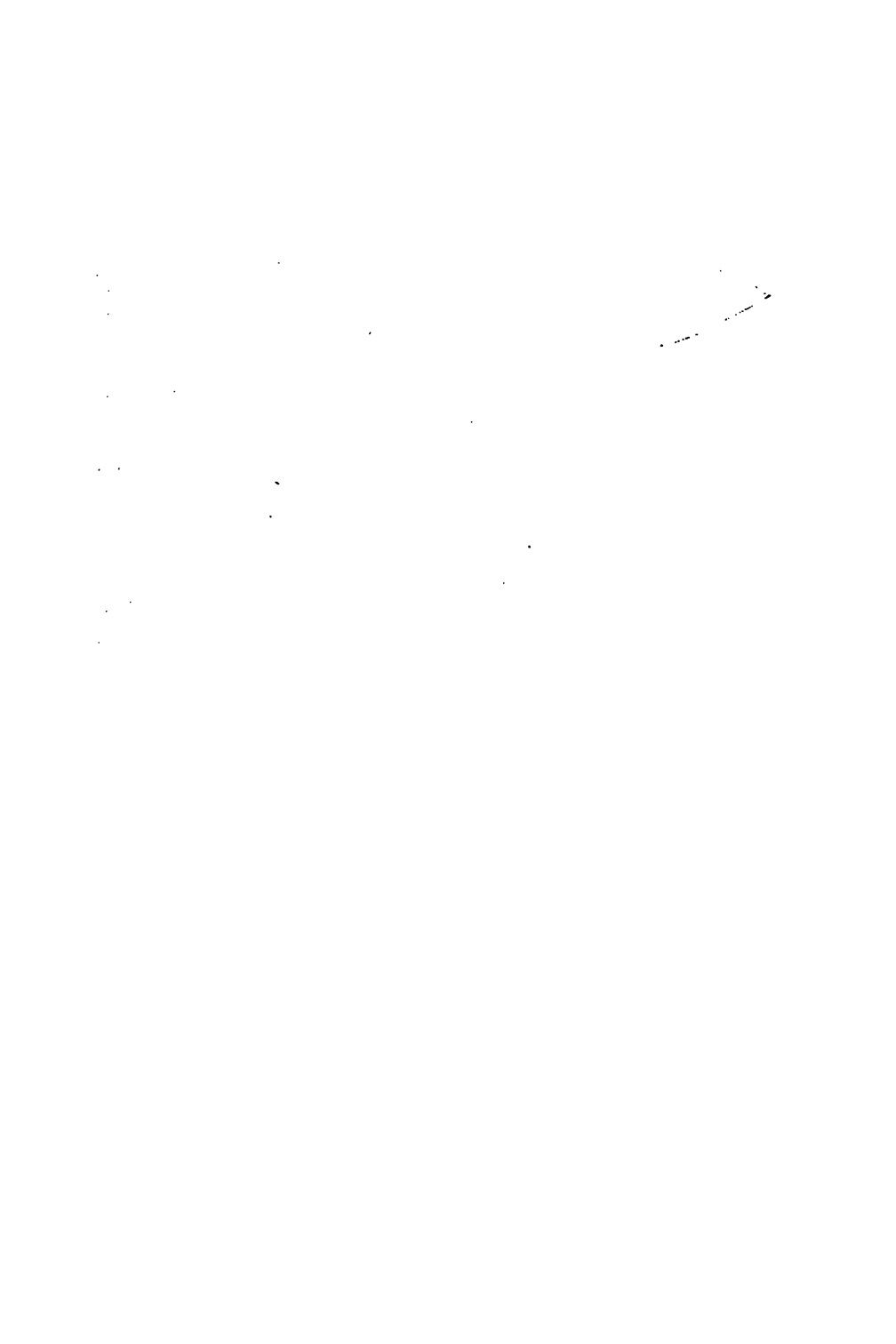
“Aw, I wanter sleep. . . .”

“You won’t start no married life gettin’

fired. You hump. . . . I'll pull the covers off—”

And Jerry, as is the fashion of men, proceeded to hump.

BOOK III
LEVITICUS



CHAPTER IX

THE SCARLET CALL

“**W**HAT you doin’, daddy?”

Pink, a slim, well-favored boy of eighteen, a senior in the negro high school, stopped at the steps to watch Jake’s peculiar motions. The old man leaned against the edge of the porch, observing thoughtfully a newspaper spread on the ground. With his cane he scored the moist ground before him.

“Readin’, Pink.”

“Why, that’s an extra—‘War Declared’! Where’d you get this?”

“Picked it up some’ars. I likes ’em wid de big letters. Here, don’t take it. . . .”

“It’s war, Grandpaw! War against Germany! The United States has declared war. Oh, Grandpaw!”

“I reckon so, I reckon so. You see, Pink,” he pointed laboriously at the paper, “I kin reckernize quite a passel uv dem letters now.

Miss' Johnson p'int's 'em out. Look, now—dat's *A*, dat is." The cane wavered over the second great screaming capital in the display head, and came to rest on it. "*A*, dat is. I kin tell 'im by de way he spraddles. One leg dis way, one leg dat—lak he wuz crossin' a fence. Dat's *A*. . . ."

"We've actually done it, Grandpaw!"

"Now, chil', look heah. Heah's anudder *A*—right heah. An' dis ain' *B*, no . . . but dis is *C*. I wuz makin' it on de groun' heah. . . . Dat's *A*; dat's *C*; an' dat's *A*. I'm gittin' ejjication myse'f, Pink. Slow, slow: but I'm gittin' it. I know sebben—I know eight letters now: only I gits *U* an' *V* mixed up; sometimes, dat is. *A*—I gets dat right, an' *B*, *C*, *I*. . . . *A*, *B*, *C*, *I*: yeah; *O*, *L*, *U*, *V*. Dat's eight. I'm atter *M* an' *N* now. 'Twould 'a' been a whole lot easier if dey'd stopped wid eight; now wouldn't it? Twenty six letters! I'll get 'em all. . . . Here's *I* now. . . ." He began to line the ground awkwardly.

"What d'ye know about this war! I didn't think we'd ever get in."

"You nebber kin tell till you gits dar, chil'. You nebber kin tell. . . . Look at dat *I*!"

“Yeah. . . . Well, I gotter go in an’ study.”

“Dat a new book, Pink?” He fingered it reverently. “See, dar’s *A!* He always spraddles. An’ *C!* Can’t fool me. . . . W’ut’s dis book named?”

“That’s Cæsar, Grandpaw.”

“Cæsar, eh? What kin’ er book’s dat?”

“It’s a Latin reader.”

“You don’ say! Latin, dat book is. Dat’s Latin. Dat’s l’arnin’, dat is.” And after Pink had slammed the door and been gone quite a few minutes, the old man was still mumbling, “Dat’s Latin. I mus’ tell Miss’ Johnson. Latin!”

His cane rested idly on the ground; it was tiring to figure out the letters . . . all the curious little wriggles and tails. . . . Well, his boys had it . . . education. His girls too. They could all read and write and figure. Jim Gaines’s kids didn’t have it. . . . Old dead Jim Gaines, rotted into the swamp so many years ago. . . .

Emancipation—that was what he and Jim used to squabble over. Emancipation. . . . Lincoln gave it. That was what education was to be for: to give his boys and girls emancipa-

tion. Daniel. . . . Louis. . . . Times had been hard, in Birmingham; they weren't so sry-looking now, after the furnace. . . . No, they worked as hard as he ever had; they hadn't gotten very far. Billy Reynolds wasn't a working man; lawyer Carmichael wasn't; a preacher wasn't. His boys had to work. Most niggers had to. . . . No emancipation for them. . . . yet. Tom: still out of jail. Ah, he'd known store niggers in Carlowville. That wasn't the way. 'Thuly—she had a kid to look after the baby, while she kept on cooking. . . . Ophelia loafing around the house. . . . Rena—he wished that was all she had been doing. . . . Only Pink left: and he studying Latin! He might be the one to find the way. There was a way. There must be a way. There must be a way. . . . *A*: that came first. Then *B*; then . . . then *C*. He must ask Miss' Johnson what came next. He must remember to ask her. . . . Latin! Studying Latin. . . . When he told her that! *B*. . . . *C*. . . .

Even *D* and *E* were crowded out of his mind in the days that followed, as the war pushed into the center of man's activities. It brought a speeding-up into the sluggishness of the iron

and steel mills; it lashed labor, raised wages, urged men to uproot themselves from rutted routines, and bend to its hard tasks and its feverish service. Dan stayed on with the old job; Louis left for the railroad yards, where the great snakes of steel cars were sent curving away to northern munition works. Tom and his gang still plied their old trade; and Louis, his ears open on the job, gave them hints that turned to easy dollars in their sieving pockets.

"They've passed that draft law, after all Congressman Gawge Adams said," announced Dan dispiritedly. "An' they call this a free country!"

"An' dat means—"

"Means we'll all hatter go to war, Grand-paw."

Tom had come in with Louis; his lips twisted downward at Dan's explanation. "They'll have to catch me fu'st."

"They'll catch everybody."

"Not our bunch. I'd like to see 'em fin' me! Me go to war? Not while the pickin's this good at home. You go, Dan: I gotter keep the home fires burnin', ain't I?" His lips wrinkled up, his teeth showed for a moment.

“That’s no way to talk,” Pink’s clear voice answered him. “I don’t care if they have got a draft: this war is fought for democracy. I heard Brother Kirkman say so!”

“A Bible spouter!”

“An’ Gawge Adams!”

“Let ’em keep their democracy! A lot of good it’ll ever do us. Lot of it we’ll ever see.”

There was a gleam in the eyes of the boy; Jake watched and listened in fascination. “President Wilson hisself says we are fighting to make the world safe for democracy! And democracy means emancipation!”

“Amen, chil’!”

“Us as well as the white folks, Tom.”

“Any day!”

“It does! It does!”

“Dat’s reasonable, praise Gawd,” the old voice fell like a calm upon the stirred feelings. “We been lookin’ fer dis democracy—dis ’man-cipation—a good long piece. En’ de President hisself done said it’s comin’. W’ut mo’ does us need?”

Tom scraped his chair back; the sound rasped and stabbed. “I’ll say it’s come when

I see it: an' I never saw it yet: an' I never will."

"If they make us fight," Louis slung at him, roused for the moment against his ally, "they've got to treat us decent, haven't they?"

Scorn curled Tom's tones. "Decent? Treat us decent? Let us boss ourselves? Give us negro officers? Negroes . . . given a chance at anything? You make me laugh! You po' simp! I ain't fooled. I don't give a damn for their government! I don't give a damn for their laws! I know every cop's ready to shoot me on sight: and every white man ready to lynch me for nothin', jus' as they did to old Jim Gaines . . . just as they did to po' Hetty Gaines. . . . Democracy? You . . . black . . . fools!"

He turned to leave, then was back at the table. "They won't get a chance at me: I'll see to that. But if they do—if they do—" His fists tightened like bent steel. "Then I kills the bull that's closest, and then . . . myself. To make niggers fight, because white folks wants 'em to; to make us dig their ditches, do the dirty work—to hell with 'em!"

They sat appalled at his outburst. Only little Pheely smiled, observing her own face sideways in the cracked mirror on the dining-room wall.

Dan cleared his throat: it sounded like a groan. Jake caught his head in his trembling hands, and pressed sharp finger-points into the temples. They could hardly hear his quiet words: "Dat . . . may . . . be . . . so . . . Oh, Gawd, ain't dar no way?"

Tom closed the door quietly behind him.

Jake looked up at last: there was a silver certainty on his face. "It mus' be so. Ain' Gawd prepare a promised lan' fer his black chillun, as well as his white ones? Ain' Mistuh Gawge Adams said so, 'n' President Wilson? It's comin', it's comin'! You boys'll see it. You boys'll see it."

Dan roused himself. "I reckon so, grand-paw. Tom don't know it all."

"Naw; he don' know it all."

What was said around the kerosene lamp on the Lowes's pine dining-table was, with minor variations, what was said around tens and hundreds and thousands of other tables in the negro homes of Birmingham. The papers were

full of democracy—the cause for which the war was waged: and no impartial scientific brain arose, to analyze the word, and reveal to rapt black ears its meaning on glib white tongues. The catchword clouded the sun with its glitter and promise: black shoulders grew straighter, black heads lifted higher, as the blinded hand at Washington drew the lots for what they were told was a selective volunteer army.

The Tom Lowes were few in number: but they were always in the murky background.

Only two of the brothers had identifying numbers in the vast martial lottery. “I ought to register; I kin fight,” Pink grumbled.

“You’s de baby,” Phoebe remonstrated. “You an’ yo’ turned-up long pants!”

“Lots of kids in school are registering.”

“I dunno, I dunno.” Jake’s mumble was uncertain.

“It’s every American’s duty, grandpaw. How are we and our kind to earn equality, if we don’t do our share?”

“Yo’ share’s to eat greens ’n’ cawn pone, till you gits mo’ lak a man,” Phoebe warned him.

“Well, with Tom gone—”

For he had gone: word came to them through an underground route that he was in the mountains in Blount County, with a colony of draft dodgers. At least, he had done what he had said. . . .

Phoebe was reticent on his course, until the drawing sent Louis off at once, with Dan scheduled to go on the next call. "My one wu'thless boy sneakin' off, an' dese two hard workers gotter leave. . . ."

"De las' shall be fu'st; don' fergit dat, Phoebe. De las' shall be fu'st. . . . An' de black man's las', sho' 'nough."

"Well, dey's fu'st to go, dat's sartin."

They received cards from Louis in the training camp, and at last the letter with the queer foreign stamp, heavily inked and censored as to its exact source. Dan was switched off into a Delaware munition factory; he at least, Phoebe reflected, was safe for a while.

There was no keener idealist than Pink among the younger negroes of the city. He worked, of course, in his off hours; but there was still time enough, in the casual curriculum of the school, to read what the minds of the world were thinking; more important, what

the negro minds of the world were saying. He took part in declamation contests and debates, and grew more sure of himself. That flame of youth that burned at Issus and Harfleur and Austerlitz was in him: and while he admired Booker Washington distantly, his enthusiasm leapt out to the sterner teaching of DuBois and his school. Yet he interpreted all this in the light of a land's fiery bath of patriotism; and time and again he came back at Jake for permission to play a more direct part in the absorbing struggle.

Graduation day came; and the diploma inscribed "Pinkham Lowe" went to the valedictorian of the class. He let Phoebe take it home, and disappeared. At supper he came in, eyes brighter than usual, a heavy secretiveness in his face.

"Well, I've done it—"

"You don' mean you's—"

"I've enlisted."

". . . Yeah."

"I had to do it, grandpaw."

"Yeah . . . you had to."

Phoebe prepared the third of her sturdy charges for the great unknown battlefields in

the mythical lands across the sea. She felt dimly comforted in her heart. Niggers were always fighting. Usually these were forbidden private scraps among themselves, or blasphemous resistance to the whites or the pervading white government. A shadowy picture of the negro cavalrymen charging down the hot Mexican valleys, after the raid on Columbus, recurred to her fancy. . . . Pink would be like that—brave, tall, imposing, terrible in battle. . . . Something else sang just out of hearing: forgotten dim clashings of stained spears, the rumbling of marchings and countermarchings from kraal to thatched village, through the lush forests under the prickly African stars. . . . Tall, imposing, terrible in battle. . . .

The bleak months passed. Marthula contributed what she could; Pheely, at work as maid in the Pratt House on Highland Avenue, helped at times; for the rest, Phoebe spent longer hours over the tub. Drawers of water and hewers of wood . . . breakers of stone and washers of clothes. . . . It was no new story.

An official report broke the gray stretch of

days, commending Sergeant Pinkham Lowe for bravery on the field of battle. His command was next to Louis', and the brother supplied most of the details. Pink had gone back and brought off his major, half dead, through the withering fire of the machine guns. . . . Pink had been gassed and shot through the shoulder; he was recovering rapidly. . . .

Then came the great collapse of 1919, and rumors of peace. Phoebe and Jake took part in the hysterical celebration of the first report of the armistice. A few days later came the soberer but equally heartfelt jubilation at the official announcement. There was democracy in the air at this hour. White brothers and sisters looked for a moment with pride at the darker ones who had uncomplainingly borne their share of the burden. Jake's old heart felt strangely elated. "I'd lak ter run across dat Jim Gaines now!"

Three weeks later a letter from Louis:

Dear grandpa and grandma, Pink is killed. Two days before the armastice they sent our companies to hold the forest sector in front of the town where we are billeted. There was too

mary for us. I saw him fall. The French general gave him the Croix de Guerre. I'll bring it home with mine. I'll be home when I can.

Your grandson,
LOUIS.

Dan came back within a month; but they did not know until Louis' return, three months later, that he too had been made a sergeant, and that his splendid record had been included in an official report to Washington. His colonel had mentioned the Congressional Medal as a possibility.

Dan was unchanged: but Louis was a different man. He had gained in height and carriage. Each of his old qualities had crystallized into definiteness. The old trace of assurance and dash was a more definite part of him now: yet at times his face held a clear and thoughtful look that reminded Jake of Pink at his peak moments. Louis had been through the fiery furnace physically unscathed, but mentally moulded and matured. Dan hulked still; Louis walked the streets like a soldier and a man.

One night Tom swaggered in.

“We heard you were back,” the sergeant said coldly.

“That’s a hell of a howdy, ain’t it?”

“Well, howdy.”

“Howdy. . . . You an’ Dan back to yo’ old places?”

“The Victory Parade will be in a month; then you’ll see Dan ’n’ me in our right places.”

“Will I, though? That might prove sump’n.”

It proved something, to Jake and Phoebe in the packed sidewalk crowds that watched and cheered it; and to Dan and Louis, who stood beside them. The negroes were not to parade, the order went forth; it might provoke disturbance.

As he was standing behind the old couple, erect in his khaki, the Croix de Guerre on his breast, Louis suddenly felt a lurching blow against his shoulder.

He turned, muscles steel. A middle-aged white man, face inflamed with liquor, faced him belligerently. “Don’t you hear me?”

“Why—”

“Why don’t you black bastards take the

whole sidewalk? Move over, damn you, when a zgentleman wants to pass."

His head wobbled triumphantly; his chin sagged uncertainly.

The negroes closed in a circle around the man. There were several other soldiers, including Dan, among them: the dark faces and appraising eyes measured the victim.

Louis' hand rested fleetingly on his service automatic; his fingers itched.

Then his face hardened to a rigid mask. "Beg yo' pardon, suh."

He moved ostentatiously aside. The ring split, to let the gentleman through.

The hosts of democracy marched on down the street; the bands blared and tooted, the crowd cheered hoarsely. . . . Victory! The war was over. . . .

Things were not easier, after the parade, for the negro veterans. A colored lieutenant was set upon, stripped, and beaten by a gang of white hoodlums in Elyton. Several ex-soldiers were arrested in shooting affrays. Stories of negro assaults crept from the middle section of the papers to the front columns.

Then came the Southern white man's ancient

answer to the growth of negro self-sufficiency—the Ku Klux Klan. The “Invisible Empire” announced its reinception; loud posters, under the skull and cross-bones, told of a monster initiation to take place at the State Fair Grounds. Many of the leading white citizens—authentic sons of the Old South—were in the movement. The defeats on the red slopes of Gettysburg and in the longer strife of trade still rankled: there was a victory near at hand they could taste; and they found the tasting good.

Curious crowds lined the announced way of march of the Klansmen, which led through the negro sections. The crowd was in the main a quiet one, although a group of little white boys ran beside and cheered, with occasional reinforcements from the spectators.

As one of the huge lighted crosses passed the corner where Phoebe stood, with her grandsons beside her—Jake was in bed with rheumatism, or he would have been there too—one of the weird hooded figures drove his horse into the crowd straight toward where she stood, pointing his torch at the colored folk. All but one drew back in fear: Phoebe coldly stood

her ground. Her boys crept back, just behind her.

The rider reined in his horse, and glared at her. "Beware of the Invisible Empire! Bow before Anglo-Saxon supremacy! The torch and the rope are hungry!"

Phoebe looked him over with scorn; the curious negroes eddied back. "You an' yo' ghos'es! We ain' skeered er no ghos'es now, white man!"

There was frightened applause at this.

The hooded rider turned and rode on.

CHAPTER X

ISHMAEL

TOM slipped back into the lawless ruts he had made before; and Dan, after looking around dispiritedly for two weeks, went back to the furnace. The pay was a little better now; the war had done that much. But Louis did not go with him.

“I’m th’ough with it,” he announced determinedly. “There’s other things in the world besides roastin’ yo’self to a slow death in the furnaces. I’m goin’ to do somethin’ different. . . . Lak bein’ a lawyer.”

“If you only could! I s’pose . . . in Lawyer Carmichael’s office . . . if he’d take you in. . . .”

“Naw, that ain’t w’ut I mean. I got my dis-charge money; I don’t have to be in no hurry to get work. I thought I’d go Nawth nex’ fall. . . . Cincinnati. . . . Probably Chicago. An’ I’d go to law school. . . . Maybe

wu'k in the day, an' go to school at night . . . or somehow."

"Dat's a gran' plan. Pink, you know. . . I was aimin' . . . yeah, he mout er been a lawyer. . . ."

"I'm goin' to."

"It's a good idea," Tom snickered when he heard the plan. "I needed you—bad—las' week. Bought a ring . . . guaranteed genuwine solid diamon'—fo' bits down, an' a dollar a week. I paid that dollar ev'y week for two years, then got tired uv payin', an' stopped. Ol' man Levy—yeah, it was his pawn shop I bought it at—he sue me. I pays Lawyer Carmichael fo' dollars an' a half to defen' my case. Levy gets the ring an' the costs; I gets a receipt f'um ol' Skin'um Carmichael, an' the privilege uv payin' the cou't costs. I sho needed you to law for me, Sergeant."

"Any fool'd know better dan to buy on de extortion plan. Ol' Jim Gaines spent all his fool cash dat way."

"Never again, for me. I'm th'ough."

"I think it was a shame, the way you were treated." Ophelia, who had dropped by, stopped manicuring her finger nails long

enough to observe Tom carefully. She was the only one, with the occasional exception of Louis, who felt at one with Tom. Let the others say what they wanted to, at least Tom dressed well, and went with classy people. He wouldn't work in a furnace, or a railroad yard . . . much less in a kitchen, or over a tub of suds.

"I paid him back," the malefactor boasted grimly. "His window was robbed a few nights ago."

"You didn'—"

"I don' know nothin' about it. I'm only tellin' you w'ut the papers said. He got paid back; that's sho."

Pheely gazed at him admiringly. People couldn't get ahead of Tom! If he were only a little lighter . . . more like herself. She knew she was soft-spoken, ladylike; her one friend, Marian Turner, a teacher at the school she had last attended, had told her that, with her family, she looked like a Northern princess in a Zulu village. The thought comforted her: as she was comforted by the respect paid her by the others, which was quite what her looks warranted.

✓ She let Tom walk part of the way with her, when she crossed to Twenty-first for the Highland Avenue car. If he were only whiter! They would have made a good couple. She knew she had style. . . . And she was educated, as was Tom; but he looked the negro, as she did not. The man who took her must be as light as she was . . . or lighter.

She had heard whispered tales of negroes who "went white." These stories were specific. Marian Turner had confided with glee that there were three United States senators, two governors, and several representatives who were known to all colored people as having the stain of negro blood, although they passed for pure white. She had showed it to Pheely in a book—a book written by a white man.

Louis had laughed at her, when she told him. Still, you never could tell.

"Come on an' ride a piece with me," she urged, still embroidering visions in which Tom, albeit with a whiter face, had part.

The Highland Avenue car rattled to a stop. Ophelia took a vacant seat by a window; the bit of wood dividing the races was just behind her.

Tom stopped to throw away his cigar, then swaggered in and down the aisle, and slumped into the seat at her side. He turned to ask her a question.

A lanky white man, lolling in the seat across, rose to his feet and tapped him on the shoulder. "Hey, nigger, don' you sit by a white woman."

Tom paid no attention to him. Drunk, probably.

Several other white men quietly joined the first speaker. "Git up, nigger, if you don't want trouble."

Too late he sensed the menace in the tones. "This woman is my sister—"

A blow smashed him full in the face. "You liar—"

"Hit 'im again!"

". . . kill him!"

"We'll pectect you, Miss."

". . . a telephone pole right there. String him up!"

The conductor had stopped the car, and stood grinning at the fracas. The lanky leader of the disturbers had Tom by the collar, shoving him up the aisle; the others drove side blows at his head, his face. There was the tinkle of

breaking glass; he felt a heavy foot strike him, as he tumbled off to the paving. An automobile swerved almost into the curb to avoid hitting him.

The car rattled on.

“Thank you so kindly,” Ophelia said, smiling out of half-closed lids. There were two rôles she could play: instinctively she adopted the newer one.

“Sit here, Miss. He won’t bother you no more.”

“You are too kind.”

She copied the intonations of her mistress perfectly. Gratefully she took the seat offered her, and stared again through the car window.

She recalled how Marthula had offered to help her find a job, when the war pinch gripped the family. Marthula, who had risen from maid to cook, sleeping in, had offered to put her in the same house. But Marian had told her of an employment agency in Third Avenue that dealt with the higher classes of service. Here she registered, and within the week had been picked by the young mistress of a white marble house on Highland Avenue.

It was all marble, Phoebe proudly told Miss’

Johnson; the lady at the agency had said so. Phoebe saw her leave in the limousine which had come to pick up her and her neat black suitcase; the grandmother felt an unusual tightening of the heart strings. Marthula . . . Tom . . . Rena . . . Dan and Louis at war . . . Pink . . . now little Pheely. The transplanted nest had grown too small for the growing birds. Of course, the boys weren't gone for good . . . or Marthula . . . or Pheely. . . . But they were gone. . . . Well, dinner would boil over while she cried in her apron. As she replenished the fire, and shaped the never-ending corn pones, she could be heard humming, again and again,

I's rollin', rollin',
Rollin' th'ough an unfrien'ly worl'. . . .

It was an unfriendly world, that took from a grandmother the children she had raised as her own . . . even as it took from the mother her own little ones. . . . Other mothers sang the same song . . . black and white. . . .

Phoebe had told some of this to the girl, when she first revisited the Scratch Ankle shack. Much of it she could not tell. But Pheely

hardly heard her; and the girl's heart sickened at the drabness she had endured so long. The Pratt house, she had found, was even more marvelous than her dream. The front was all marble and wonderful; the vast halls, the polished woodwork, even the kitchen and her own little room, were unbelievably grand. She turned to her new duties with enthusiasm.

It was two nights before she saw the master of the house. Young Tom Pratt was the son of the president of the Steel National Bank. On his wedding, a year before, he had been given this house by his father, as well as a secure berth as second vice-president of the institution. He came into the boudoir where Ophelia was dressing Miss' Marjorie's hair. He noticed the new girl at once; but apparently he did not see her again. He was wise in the ways of women, white and nearly white.

Other opportunities came to him of coming into the room when the deft-fingered girl was hooking up her mistress, or setting the room in order after the lady of the house had gone down to dinner. He said nothing to her; but Ophelia's color flooded her cheeks, and left them marble pale, at his casual look.

Her dreams became uneasy with the figure of a lover, whose face was tantalizingly vague, and who was on the other side of a deep ravine from her. And then, in her dream, a narrow uncertain bridge stretched across the chasm. Timidly, desperately, she inched along it, toward the waiting lover.

The bridge swayed perilously; but it still held. She noticed that the end she had left was in shadow, and the other end in the light.

It trembled, trembled. . . . She held out her arms beseechingly.

And there the dream stopped. But the living thing behind it pushed on.

As the Highland Avenue car rattled away, bearing Pheely and her ornate visionings, Tom Lowe picked himself out of the street. He felt of his face to make sure that no bones were broken, and dusted himself off carefully. If he had just guessed that trouble was coming, it would have ended differently. Well, he'd recognize that man again. . . . Some day. . . .

As the weeks went by, he saw less and less of Pheely; and the family saw little of either of them. Tom saw a lot of Louis, though; the lure that had brought the hard-working furnace

hand to watch with the gang while they robbed the cars, on that first night in the forgotten days before the war, still called him. It was the tang of the forbidden, the outlawed: it was in his blood.

“Who wuz right?” Tom was fond of asking. “Who wuz right, Sergeant? You ‘n’ Dan ‘n’ grandpaw knew all about what this war would bring, didn’t you? You wuz bright, wuzn’t you?”

“Things is better. . . .”

“You read yo’ *Times Plain Dealer*; it’s mush-mouthed enough, but some uv the truth creeps in. I read the New Yawk papers too. . . . What have we got out uv the war? Lynching . . . disfranchising . . . enforced ignorance . . . thievin’. . . with every merchant and cop and lawyer and judge bunched against us. That’s what they all do—and you think I steal! In Maryland they let the negroes into the American Legion; then at the convention they make ‘em eat in a different room. Thank God the negroes got up and walked out! When there’s a riot, they disarm the negroes, and arm the whites . . . and what they do to negro women, searching ‘em for arms. . . . You know it,

Sarge, as well as I. Lynching? They've lynched five women . . . *five*, I tell you, in the last year and a half. What for? They shot and gutted one for sayin' she'd tell the grand jury the names of the men that lynched her husband, if she knew them. They got another for trying to collect a washin' bill. That's what we've got out of the war."

"But President Wilson said we'd get full citizenship rights out of the war, didn' he?"

"An' what's he now? A cripple . . . helpless. . . . He's said a lot; but sayin' don't bring back to life those negroes lynched for white men's lies, or the negro girls white brutes have handled. No, Louis; the sooner you realize that the law is a white man's game, and that the black man is out of it—and 's gotter stay out and play his own game. . . . Look at our gang."

"I'm goin' to be a lawyer, anyway."

"I ain' stoppin' you."

Once or twice Louis went along with the crowd when they tried the devious ways of out-lawry in the railroad yards; but for the most time he applied himself to picking up what he

could in Lawyer Carmichael's office, and at the bank.

The night before he was to leave for Chicago Tom found him alone on the Lowe porch. He plucked familiarly at his brother's watch-chain. "Come along, spoht; big night tonight!"

"What kinder spoht you spohtin' tonight?"

"Kid, we're rattling hardware tonight. . . . Blooie, blooie! Bang, bang! Knives . . . pistols . . . ev'ything. Chigger's room, at eleven. Good?"

"Now, Tom, I. . . ."

"See you there, big boy."

Just after eleven Louis walked up, and gave the knock that gained admittance.

"Lawdie, heah's de Sergeant!"

"Howdy, sojer."

The room was lit by gas, with a green shade: it held a piano, an old organ, a victrola, two piano lamps, an army cot, a white chiffonier, and, in the middle, a baize-covered table. There were three chairs about the table, and two negroes to each chair. Tom was counting out chips as Louis entered; the two Ricks boys sat beside him, and Mule White and another man across. Butt, Louis remembered, had been

shot by detectives a year before; Sam Wyatt had died in the war. These were the only casualties so far.

Sam's brother, Banjo Jim Wyatt, bent over the piano keys, while Mule White groaned out a lugubrious dirge.

Rather be in Texas, Lawd,
 In a lion's den,
 Dan to be in Bummin'ham,
 In de fix I'm in.

All joined in the refrain,

Lawd,
 In de fix I'm in.

"Djer bring that gin, Tom?"

"They sold it fer gin. Ain't sayin' w'ut it is."

"Pull it out, man! . . . Where in hell's that old corkscrew?"

Rather be dead, Lawd,
 An' in my grave,
 Dan to be in Bummin'ham,
 Treated lak a slave.

Lawd,
 Treated lak a slave.

"Dat's how dey'd lak to treat us."

"Djer see the *Times Plain Dealer* today?
 Feller I knew in France—boy named Lucian

McCarty—was roped and dragged though Bogalussy, Lousianny, and burned. Said he'd insulted a white woman. That was all. The sheriff toted his heart home . . . souvenir."

"Knew him in France, Sarge—in the war?"

"Yes—decent feller, too. Private; he got some sort er medal."

"Mo' uv that democracy you wuz expectin', huh? You're strong fer that, huh? The only sort of democracy I believes in is right here. . . ." He half pulled his automatic from its scabbard.

"Cut de bull, Tom, an' pass dat gin."

Rather be on de levee, Lawd,
A-shovelin' sand,
Dan to be in Bummin'ham,
Be a po' white man.

Then with great gusto,

Lawd,
Be a po' white man.

"Mmm! Dat goes down smooth."

"Heah, man, don' smoothe too much uv it. Pass dat bottle!"

"Jumpin' Jesus, don' joggle my arm! I'll get th'ough w'en I's th'ough, an' not befor'. . . There!"

“Hot damn! That’s the stuff. . . .”

Rather be in de river, Lawd,
 Floatin’ lak a log,
 Dan to be in Bummin’ham,
 Treated lak a dog.

Lawd,
 Treated lak a dog.

Rather be dead, Lawd,
 In de bottom pit uv Hell,
 Dan to be in Bummin’ham,
 In a lousy cell.

“All togedder, now—”

LAWD,
 In . . . a . . . lousy . . . cell!

“Well, that’s where you’re aimin’ for,”
 Louis warned them.

“An’ you, Sergeant?”

“Oh, anything once.”

“An’ dat gin twict. Gimme anudder swig,
 you black hog, or I’ll decapacitate yo’ brains,
 assumin’ you got one er maybe two.”

“Dat’ll do f’um you, Mule. Any man’ll let
 an ’ooman knock him cock-eyed, an’ den tromp
 on ’im—”

“You’s young, Banjo. W’en dey gits hol’
 er you, whooie! You won’ know yo’ gizzard
 f’um yo’ lef’ hin’ foot.”

“Well, let’s mosey along. You all know where the car is: same lookouts. Move slick, too: them dicks ain’t forgot that last job we pulled off.”

“Lemme empty dat bottle fu’st. . . . Dar! Ef I meets a cop now, I’ll bite off bofe his ears, an’ fry ’em fer breakfas’. Shake yo’ hoofs, gents! Shake yo’ dogs!”

Chigger turned off the gas, and locked the door. They passed single file down the creaking stairs, and out into the mellow September air. Far to the east the splendid sword of Orion hung from its starry scabbard; above them Arcturus flung his flame; to the west Vega and Altair smouldered. The men looked carefully at the sky. “Good thing there ain’t any moon. It’s dark enough to drown a white cat.”

Half of the party swung down the alley toward Twenty-fourth; the others passed to the north of the viaduct, and spread out as they got within a block of Morris Avenue. Tom, Louis, and Banjo were the northern group of this division. They skirted the dark shadow of a freight station, and stood expectant. Before them, across the last stretch of a half dozen

tracks, was the empty freight platform where two beheaded cars stood.

“The one this way,” Tom whispered.

Everything was quiet. They heard the last street car clang over the bridge, a block and a half to the south. Quiet again.

“Now!”

Skulking, half creeping, the three men made their way over the broken tracks. Louis caught his heel in a switch, and fell heavily on his face in the cinders; but so fully did he let himself go, that the others hardly heard his fall. He limped along more carefully now. Ah! Here they were.

In the heavier darkness of the freight shed they straightened up. They stood tense, wordless, for a time. At last four figures from the north joined them.

There was a hushed consultation. Tom and Louis went to the south platform to watch, and two others to the north. Chigger Ricks broke the seal, and went after the hinges. They could hear the long hiss as the staples were pried out.

Everything was quiet down the yards, Louis noticed. The watchman's shack was almost a block away. Down at Twentieth Street cross-

ing he saw the lights shift from yellow to red, as a lone engine passed up on the far eastern track. It was more than a block away.

His wearied eyes would hardly keep awake, so monotonous was the watch. All at once the mask of fatigue cracked to something alert and fearful. His nerves quivered and jangled. There—in the darkness—at the top of the south end of the bridge. . . . There, again! A lantern swinging! And now it was out. . . .

He must have been dreaming! . . . He couldn't have been. There wasn't anything there. . . . He'd better tell Tom, anyhow.

He tiptoed back. "Lantern—Twenty-first an' First."

Tom slipped ahead hurriedly and gazed for a long time without stirring. "Nothin'."

He went back to his watch. Louis continued to study the disturbing darkness. There was no reassurance in this quiet: he was unstrung, jangled. . . .

He started, as Tom's hand fell on his shoulder. "I saw one, at the other end. . . . I don't like this."

The two went back to the mouth of the car. The others were well inside now; about a fourth

of the contents had been removed to the platform. "Lanterns at both ends of the bridge, Banjo."

"Hell, you'd git frightened at a grubworm! Sure?"

"Yeah."

"I'm damned. . . . There's seven of us here . . . an' three. . . ."

"Leave the stuff, an' all scout up the viaduck. . . ."

"I don't believe no one's dar. . . ."

"Well—"

"Us fo' dis way; you all souf."

The group separated; each slid away into the obscurity. The night throbbed, heavy and menacing: the shrouding uncertainty pulsed and quivered, as if about to pounce upon them.

Suddenly, off to the east, they heard two clear whistles. . . . "Us'd better go on—"

Just before they reached the great bridge supports on the near side of Morris Avenue, a flashlight darted and widened from the darkness, revealing their four stark forms.

"Hands up—"

"Fade!"

Chigger, Banjo, Tom, sprang to the south; the light was shortest here. Louis, bewildered, jumped north.

Pistols popped, tiny sounds in the arching silence. Stabbing red flames leapt briefly toward them. There was the withering hiss of bullets.

Tom and Chigger returned the fire at the same moment. They saw, at this second, Louis, still in the glare of the flashlight, which had followed him, stagger, stumble, crash heavily off the curbing. His black figure twitched in the glare of the light.

The accusing brightness swung around toward them.

All three men shot together this time, aiming around the dark base of the light. A gurgling scream . . . coming from nothing, ending in nothing. . . .

“Popped him!”

Tom clung against Banjo. “Got me.” His head sagged, his voice was muffled.

Banjo waited for no more. Taking Tom’s limp body in his arms, he ran down the tracks, south of the car sheds, toward Twentieth Street. Chigger stayed behind. Banjo could

hear the sporadic sputter of shots, all the way to Twentieth.

He crossed the tracks before he reached the corner, and considered. It wouldn't be safe to make Chigger's room now. He himself lived on Northside. He decided on old Jake Lowe's place.

His burden grew heavier and heavier, as he neared Eighteenth Street. Somehow he crossed it, without attracting the attention of the watchman. He stayed beneath the buildings until he reached Fifteenth, then turned south. There was no policeman here, he knew. He fell, just after he crossed Avenue A. Well, up again. Somehow he made the last hundred feet, and collapsed with his burden on the front porch.

After a long wait there was a sound of scuffling within. "Whatcher want?"

"It's me . . . Banjo Wyatt. . . Hyah's Tom. He's daid. An' Louis's daid."

Old Jake threw open the door, shielding a wind-whipped candle-flame in his hands. His long night-gown flapped around his dark legs. "Tom . . . Louis. . . Did you say . . . Louis?"

Banjo Jim pulled out a pipe, and filled it shakily. He placed it in his mouth sideways; the tobacco spilled, an unnoticed stream, to the porch. "Yeah. I said Louis. . . . 'N' Tom."

The old man knelt beside the figure, thrown supine, arms limp, on the splintered flooring. "Tom. . . . But dis is Tom. I knowed he'd git killed, some day. . . . You ain' said—Louis?"

"My Gawd, man, is you deaf? I says Louis. . . . Whar'll I put 'im?"

The old man turned in without a word; Banjo hoisted the burden to his back, and followed. He laid it on the broken-back couch in the dining room. He could hear Jake within, rousing Phoebe. "Get up, 'ooman. Two mo' uv dem boys gone."

"Hey, Jake! He's alive! He groaned!"

Phoebe's frightened face wavered uncertainly in the nervous trembling of the candle flame.

"Louis . . . ?"

"Dis is Tom. . . ."

"He's alive, Jake!"

"Maybe Louis's alive, man?"

"Maybe . . . maybe."

"Whar is he?"

"Lef 'im at Morris Avenoo 'n' Twenty-fu'st

Street. Better look fer 'im in jail—er de horsepittal.”

Jake stooped forward, awkwardly pulling on his breeches. “You’ll git a doctor for Tom, Banjo?”

“Oh, sho. What doctor?”

“Any un.”

“Whar you gwine?”

“Atter Louis. . . . Atter Louis. . . .”

CHAPTER XI

THE SWAMP LIGHT

THE fitting weeks that followed Ophelia's entrance into the house of the Pratts were marked by an increasing, ingrowing loneliness. Out of the enforced absorption with self came knowledge of self.

She had felt alone in the dingy house in Scratch Ankle. She was different from her neighbors and her family: different in color, different in mood. Her brothers, Marthula, were educated, as was she: but their minds were bent to their work, or to questions that did not, could not, interest her: politics, church, lodge meetings. They saw these with negro eyes; and she . . . she was white.

White! She could not tell what forbidden strain, running back to old Phoebe Clopton, or even before her, had reappeared in her straight brown hair, and her delicate ivory skin, with its fitful charm of pink. . . . Out of black

swamp mire white lilies bloomed. . . . The white strain was there: it was her. She felt more and more determined to live up to it.

When she was at home at Scratch Ankle, Marian Turner could run down and see her; but Highland Avenue was a long way from Avenue D. She was driven more and more into herself.

She looked first outside of herself for the association, the culture, she had determined to have. Here, within austere marble walls, was the culture: but it was in the dining-room, the living-room, not in the servants' quarters. The few skilled servants were, after all, negroes, who thought and lived as negroes. The garage hands, gardeners, chauffeurs . . . she preferred not to think of them.

They repaid her indifference with dislike. She grew hungry for personal contact with the thing she sought. Something else in her hungered too . . . that part of her that woke while she slept, and crept further and further across the trembling bridge, toward the vague figure of light that waited. . . waited. . . .

She began to walk alone, in her own dusk hours. Several times she knew that she was

followed. Her step quickened, to prevent herself from being accosted.

She knew that she was fleeing desire.

Two or three times a certain car coasted behind her, half a block away, when she took the higher, less frequented roads above Highland Avenue. . . . Nothing else, for three drab weeks. Perhaps the chance had gone by. . . .

One evening, as she came again to the curve of the Avenue, on the far side of one of the hollow valleys scalloping it, the same car passed slowly. A man, hunched inside his ample coat, leaned out. "Want a ride?"

The voice had smooth comforting intonations. She recognized it. She climbed in.

The car made for Red Mountain, crossed the crest, and, after striking the valley road, whirled away toward the west. The night breeze sprayed her cheeks cool; ghostly trees and farm-houses danced by.

She had dreamed of this. . . .

"I oughtn't to be. . . ."

"No, suh."

Tom Pratt laughed quietly. "I'm doing it."

Over the bridge just below Oxmoor; up the

height of Shades Mountain. Below them strung the black reaches of the valley, a few dull stars of farmhouse lights by their very distance magnifying the isolation. On and on . . . until Highland Avenue and the city and the things of home were almost beyond the horizon of memory.

He stopped the car. She slipped out, stretching car-tired muscles in sheer rapture. She was hotly conscious of her tingling body. She flung her arms wide to the night: she knew she must narrow their embrace.

On the gray slope of an outcrop rock he spread a steamer rug. She picked her way over to it, and eased herself down. Quietly she sat, nursing her knees within her arms. They must hold something. . . .

He slid down beside her. Softly he touched the nearest hand. She shivered slightly. The black night caved in toward her, until she felt her white body fouled by its intruding presence. She let her hand lie in his. The night bellied out again, like windblown canvas: the darkness was whirled away by an inner glow that made the rocky height her own.

Hot restless hands moved upward along her

arms. She felt her shoulders clenched tight, so tight that breathing was anguish. Over the man's shoulder the low moon reached glimmering fingers, stroking her face to a shining wonder: from her far-away eyes a far-away light gleamed eerily. A shiver that was not all desire shook him. Following this, his only thought was of the warm sweet breathing thing that was here, was his. His bent head neared the sweetness.

It was like a bird of prey, this shadowed face above her, hovering just over her lips. . . . She wanted to fling herself down in worship. . . . Then she felt startingly alone. It was as if she looked through the wrong end of a telescope. . . . The clenching lover, the world, the blended days of service and schooling and far childhood, shrank unbelievably small: tiny figures, Jake, Phoebe, Tom, even this white master, walked, like shrivelled pigmies, speaking in tones so tiny that their loudest cry was a silence. Nothing was real. . . . Far away was the white lover of her dreams: she herself, far away. . . . This ungainly hugeness, at once her body and not her body,—this was not her. . . . Something was missing. . . .

Perhaps it was her sanity: for the moment she knew she was mad.

Then, through the still night, a far sound pulsing. . . . Like the vague, faint echo of her heartbeat. The sound lifted clearer: it rose from the creek lands crouching below the crest. She knew it now—the harsh guttural croak of bull frogs, the shrill answer of the tree toads . . . softened by the height, “Knee deep . . . knee deep . . . better go round . . . better go round. . . .” The song of home—that far home in the hazy murk of the Black Belt. . . . The song of home, come back through the throbbing night to comfort her, and quicken her. A song too old to be remembered sang in her blood, and bent her will as wind bends low the clover.

The bird of prey hovered, lighted. She gave her lips wholly. The moon dulled, as a cloud scoured it from view. . . .

A knob of stone pressed painfully against her shoulder. Its unease was ecstasy. . . .

There were other nights.

Love, such love as had come to her, had to be a hidden thing, in this land where it grew. This was not her seeking, or her lover's: it was

the law. It was written law, heavy with ponderous penalties; it rested upon a deeper law, the law of the tribe. There were gay lands where it was not the law: it had seeded here in black days when black hands were a badge of slavery. Even in those days, lusty masters had scorned it. It was a law born of race snob-bishness, that yielded to individual hungers. It rooted in a deep conservatism—to conserve the pure stream of untainted blood. Yet there are times and places when rude blood has quickened the fine, the wasted, the thinned.

Tom Pratt and Ophelia Lowe did not philosophize about the matter. The butterfly needs no synthesis of logic to send him to the flower; the flower turns to the sun, with never an analysis of heliotropism. Life is its own excuse for being.

“Ophelia, you *are* white. . . .”

“Yes.”

“You’re more than everything to me. . . .”

“. . . And you—”

“I’d like to leave it all, and— You and me. . . . We could travel all over the world. . . .”

“I’d do—”

“Moonflower! . . . But—I can’t.”

“No.”

“Tied down . . . hand and foot. I’ve been thinking. . . . I’ve told you of Philip Bayne. . . . He bought a little home in Elyton—”

“I remember—”

“I’ve seen a place beyond Ensley—”

“ . . . whatever you decide.”

“You are to be white there, you understand. . . . The neighborhood is cheap, compared to Highland Avenue; but the houses are all new, and the people . . . they aren’t society. . . . Hardly any real Southerners. There, you could—” He tossed the cigarette stub, a sputtering arc of fire, through the night. “Moonflower! You would be white . . . there.”

“Oh, if you would—”

“And you would make a little home there, Moonflower. . . . Ours. . . .”

“All yours.”

There came the day when she left her position; she had accepted work out of town, she explained. One of the Pratt cars took her to the union station. Another, with Tom at the wheel, took her off the train at Bessemer.

The Lowes could not find trace of her: Ophelia Lowe had gone as thoroughly as if the great fish of Jonah had swallowed her. Yet the three days had been compressed into the scant half hour needed to ride to Bessemer. She was in her own home . . . white . . . at last!

She held herself aloof from the neighbors; and they decided that that pretty, fragile Mrs. Hartwell was a bit snobbish, but with a neighborly smile. She was apparently well to do; she certainly had swell visitors, once every so often. Some kind of widow, evidently. . . .

It was a standing regret with Tom Pratt that Marjorie had had no children. When Ophelia whispered to him that a child was coming, he was overcome with delight. It did not take him long to mature into the worried embryonic father. Nothing was too good for her; the layette was the most elaborate that could be obtained, the obstetrician and trained nurses the most able and discreet that Birmingham contained. . . .

For a few bleak dark hours, the shadow of death hovered over the little house: then the day broke suddenly.

The telephone roused the waiting man.

"Yes, it's a boy! . . ."

"I'll come right out. . . ." He hung up the receiver, then called the house again.

"And—the mother?"

"Resting splendidly."

"Right away. . . ."

When Ophelia was able to sit up, in the room that had blossomed into a spread of roses, Tom neglected the office to be with her.

"I'm going to call him Tom, anyway."

"Moonflower . . . mother!"

"They say," she blushed rosily, "he's the living image of . . . of his father."

"He has my hair . . . yellow. . . ."

"Yes. . . . It isn't—"

"What, dearest?"

"A bit . . . kinky, is it?"

Tom Pratt's nose wrinkled. How could she use that word about those curls!

Ophelia had a white nurse for little Tom, and a white maid to keep the house in order. She was afraid to try colored help. Some slip might betray her. . . . But her apt mimicry of Miss' Marjorie carried her through every ordeal.

Two rich years followed. Tom was with her

a great part of his time—of course, not so much as she would have chosen. But, compared to any other of a hundred fates! She watched the little life grow; she went back to her books, to nibble delicately at their contents. She felt herself one of the elect of the earth.

There was one cloud. It was nothing tangible; it was a gnawing worry that woke her in the morning chill, and held her sleepless, eyes fixed on the blank ceiling, mind racing despairingly down hateful roads. Little Tom's hair was a wee bit too curly . . . his skin a wee bit too dark. . . . Of course, Italian babies—lots of others—were much darker. But—her own lily skin: Tom Pratt's blond whiteness.

She was torturing herself unnecessarily, she knew. Boy was every bit as white as herself. And yet—and yet. . . .

She had a speaking acquaintance with the neighbors now. Mamie, the maid, took Boy out to play with their children: he was one of them.

Day after day passed, dulling the cutting edge of her midnight fears.

The noise of the children at play in the trim side yard pushed through the laced rambler

leaves at the window. She stopped near, a song on her lips, to listen to the golden prattle.

There were the two Reynolds children, a boy and a girl, from across the street, and a cousin, a boy slightly older, whom she had seen once before.

"Naw, dimme my dollie," Susie at last demanded of her diminutive host, proud in his new sailor suit.

"Naw. Let me play wid it," Boy explained patiently. "You got my Teddy. . . ."

Mamie had stuck together a bright crown of four-o'clock blossoms; the youngster was fitting it around the tinted plaster brows of the big doll.

"Aw, you dimme." She began to cry.

"But I want—"

"Aw, give it to her," the young cousin commanded, in fierce partizanship. "Give it to her, you little . . . nigger."

Ophelia moved back from the window. Her lips drew down, her throat was rigid. She guided herself unsteadily to the couch. Here she crumpled in a faint.

The gay voices rippling through the window brought her back to herself. The afternoon

sun beat brightly against the rambler blossoms. She moved unsteadily to the window. A deadly nausea shook her. . . . She looked out.

Mamie was lying on her back in the grass; the four happy children were pelting her with coreopsis blooms.

Ophelia collapsed by the window, her forehead striking the sill. . . . Everything was the same: and nothing was, nor ever could be, again the same.

That boy . . . that . . . that little—devil. Oh, he hadn't said it! It didn't mean anything, anyhow; children used all sorts of silly names. Most mothers could have shrugged the matter off with this explanation. Ophelia could not. Her soul was stained too deeply with the fear, the suspicion, that had grown in her sleepless midnights.

The boy would not have used the word, unless he meant something by it. She must find out how much was known; it would do no good to postpone now. Anyhow, she could move.

. . . Thank God, Mary Reynolds would tell her.

She crossed the street, unnoticed by the children. She was breathless when she reached

her neighbor's kitchen "I wanted to ask. . . . If I'm not . . . disturbing. . . ."

"My dear, you're ill! Whatever—"

"A splitting headache. . . . I've had one . . . all day." She floundered for the exact form of question to use. She mustn't give herself away. "That . . . that little boy is . . . is your nephew, isn't he?"

"Who. . . . You mean Alonso? Why, what has he done?"

"Oh, nothing . . . that is . . . uh . . . he's done nothing wrong. Just thoughtless. The children were quarreling a little—"

"I know it isn't Boy's fault, Mrs. Hartwell. He's a very well-behaved little shaver. Has Alonso been—"

"He's—he's—" She suppressed the strong temptation to use tears. "I don't like what he's said. . . . It wasn't nice."

"What did he—"

"He called Boy a name . . . a—nigger . . . a little nigger, or something like that. . . ."

"Why, Mrs. Hartwell!"

"That wasn't . . . nice."

Mrs. Reynolds' face grew grave. "No. That was not nice. It was very wrong. . . ."

He's only a baby, of course. . . . I was afraid he'd been listening—”

“Listening? You mean . . . he heard . . . he overheard. . . .”

“I suppose I should have told you, Mrs. Hartwell; but it didn't seem right neighborly . . . decent. You know what old tabbies some of these women are: Miss Pritchett . . . Miss' Otis. They . . . they've. . . . I don't believe a word of it, anyway.”

Ophelia's face remained inscrutable; but her blood suddenly chilled. They had been talking, then. . . . Well, at least, she could move away. . . . “What did they—”

“I don't know how to say it. They said they had seen a man visit you . . . several times . . . who kept his hat pulled down, and all. . . . They said he was. . . . And then, Boy is quite dark—”

“But I don't understand! You mean they implied—”

“Yes. That you had a visitor who was . . . colored. . . .”

Ophelia did not mince words. “That I had a negro lover, you mean. Of all the absurd, ridiculous! . . . I know who they mean. Why,

that man is as white—as white—he belongs to one of the leading families of Birmingham. I'll have to be frank with you: there are reasons . . . he shouldn't ever visit me, I suppose—”

“My dear, that's your business. Everybody's got to settle their own problems of right and wrong. I like you: that's enough for me.”

“But—the idea that he's—”

“It's just what they said . . . spiteful old tabbies! I told George I was sure there was nothing to it. . . . Alonso must have overheard some of it. He will be punished for saying—”

“Oh, don't be hard on him. . . . I'm so glad you've told me.”

“I knew it was just . . . gossip, my dear. Probably it wouldn't have risen at all, if Boy hadn't of been so dark, and you so light-favored. . . .”

The answer was painfully deliberate. “Yes: that must have been the reason. I'm ever so much obliged. . . .”

“Nothing at all. Send the children over for their supper, won't you? That Sue of mine ought to have been in bed at five. . . .”

Her head was aching violently, now. She sat

in the living room, in the dusk. . . . Through the open door came the comfortable clatter as Mamie fixed the supper things, and gave Boy his meal. . . . What a mix-up! They might have suspected that she. . . . But—Tom!

Of course, it was Boy they had noticed, after all. . . . And that—that was the thing. . . . What difference did it make whether they made a ridiculous error, and thought that Tom. . . .

Boy wasn't white! They called him . . . nigger!

And if she moved somewhere else, how would that be any better? They'd notice . . . people would notice, sooner or later. . . . If she moved too far away, Tom wouldn't be with her. . . .

She dismissed Mamie; no, she couldn't eat. . . . She sat alone in the dark house. . . . It seemed bright, compared to the darkness within her.

Other negroes—senators, governors, had gone white. . . . Marian had said so. . . . They passed for white. . . .

What about their children?

She had done it, but for Boy. He had to spoil all. He was black—he would grow up cursed with that stigma—one of the inferior

race—the servant race. Even in the North it was so—lots of people had told her. . . .

She had been successful in her wild attempt: and now the baby had spoiled everything. For a moment she wanted to kill him—anything—to get him out of the way. A chill wave of repulsion swept over her, so painful that she moaned gently at it. The idea that she could hurt her darling little one, to better herself! She pushed the thought violently out of her mind. A new chain of thoughts came. She was not shrewd enough to see through the mask they wore.

A sense of deep guilt folded around her, choking her. She had ruined her boy's life—she had ruined the life of Tom's son. The negro blood in her had done it. He would grow up accursed—one of a servant race—an inferior. The old cycle of thoughts repeated themselves wearily; but they led to a different gate now. Boy's life was ruined. . . . She would rather see him in his coffin, than condemned to a life of misery. He would be better off. . . . For his sake, she owed it to him to make it impossible for him to hear that taunt flung in his face, to sear his soul! He was too

little now, to understand: later on, it would cripple all his years. She owed it to him to prevent the misery now. Babies died—it was an accident. . . .

Her face gaunt and stretched, she picked her way in fearful quiet to his bedroom.

She held her own breath, as she stood above the little bed. He had not even been disturbed; his soft, clear breathing sounded and reverberated through her. It was such a noise, the neighbors must hear, she fancied, and come streaming in, crying “Nigger!” She clutched her arms, until the nails pressed aside the muscles and pinched the bone. She must do it—now!

She crept closer. The cold iron of the bed chilled her knees, and printed itself against them. She slipped her hand under his shoulders,—it would be easy from there—she raised the sleeping body half upright. Her eyes were closed, her agonized face turned up to the blankness above her. Her face was twisted into a grotesque contortion. Now, now! It must be now. . . . Her hands slipped along his shoulder, and touched the bare flesh of his neck. . . .

“Mudder!”

It did not need the drowsy cry to bring her to herself. The first touch of the naked flesh went through her like the touch of a living wire. Why, this was Boy—her Boy . . . hers and Tom’s. . . Hurt him! She had him out of bed, his sleep-drugged face clenched against her breast: the whole despairing pain of her heart broke in an hysteric shower of tears.

“Boy . . . Boy . . . Mother’s Boy . . .”

She cuddled him back to sleep again. When all was quiet, she tiptoed again into the spotless sitting room, with its dishevelled corner where she had been sitting the last five hours. This time she touched the button and filled the room with the rosy radiance of clinging light.

That was not the way.

It did not hurt so now. Her plans were nothing, that was true: they had collapsed at that one word like a child’s balloon carelessly pricked by a pin. But something had broken in her, too—and she faced the future with the wrenching agony gone.

Painstakingly she went over it once more. Boy was negro. She could not, for anything, give him up—that much was certain. . . .

Not for Tom. . . . Not even for herself. It had been a false light that she was following—one of those swamp lights that she and Rena had once hopefully sought, in the black depths of the mired home land. It had promised her emancipation—freedom from the stigma and strain of inferiority that, after all, was her birthright. A swamplight. . . .

Her brother, Tom, she knew, was lying at home, slowly recovering from that bullet through his lungs. He had thought he had found a way out. . . . A swamp light. . . . And Pink, with his wordy passion of patriotism: Pink, black boy under a white cross in France . . . Louis, with his education, his ambition, his easy-going nature, buried over in Rosedale cemetery . . . Dan, with his patient plans to leave the furnace drudgery for something bigger . . . Rena, wilfully choosing her slack path to freedom from drudgery . . . Marthula, seeking through patient acceptance of toil and home life . . . old Jake, who knew it was coming—to his grandchildren, if not to himself. . . . What led them all, but mocking, taunting swamp lights?

As things were—while the white race was the

white race, and the negro the negro—while the sun rose and set, and the bleak winters and bland summers passed and repassed over two differing peoples, set down side by side in the same land to work out a joint destiny—there could be no equality. So she told herself. As long as either race had as its ambition to remain itself, there must be conflict. For equality meant sameness, oneness. . . .

It was hard, it was hard on those who were neither of the one nor the other wholly—involuntarily bound to both camps: ground between the two. The whites called them negroes; yet they were not wholly negroes. There were many of these. . . . Equality meant sameness, oneness. . . .

She could go North with Boy— Tom Pratt would see to it. She would lose Tom. . . . But, then, Boy—Boy was negro. There would be no gain in that.

And she—she was negro, too. By the standard of the white race, she was all negro. Alone, she might have fought against it. But with Boy. . . .

She could continue this life— No, not with that taunt on white lips. There was but one

life for her: the life she had left so eagerly. She must go back.

She must go back.

Her talk with Tom was brief and passionless. Something within her, that was once fire and delight, was now ashes.

“But, my dear—anywhere—”

“No.”

“I can come North, even, and see you three or four times a year, Moonflower. . . .” The term was shopworn now. All things grow shopworn, Tom reflected. “Anything but—but this. . . .”

“There’s always . . . Bcy.”

“And you wouldn’t . . . put him . . . somewhere else?”

“Tom, Tom. . . .”

“Well. . . .” He finished his demi-tasse thoughtfully, and came over beside her. She let him take her in his arms. “Tonight, anyhow. . . .”

“Tom. . . . It would only make it harder.” Her breath came and went in gasps. “I Jon’t think. . . .”

And all at once this struggle was too hard for her. Her steel resistance was broken.

Her doubts quieted . . . this last night. . . .

The next day she went with Boy to see the old grandparents. . . . If they preferred, of course, she would not come. . . .

That afternoon her trunks and furniture were moved in. She took the half of the house the Johnsons had once occupied. Uncomplainingly she took up the life she had left these few brief years before.

Tom Pratt took it rather hard, at first. But there had been an element of domestic monotony in the arrangement, which had driven him afeld before. He resought these bypaths; the sharp memories of the Louse in Ensley blurred to accepted forgetfulness.

He told the story later to several of his closest friends. He came to agree with their decision. "Hell, what could you expect! . . . A nigger!"

CHAPTER XII

EMANCIPATION

OPHELIA found plenty to busy her hands and rest her thoughts, in the management of the house on Avenue B. Phoebe was plainly getting old: she seemed to have aged fifteen years in the three years since the daughter had seen her. Jake too had lost the spring in his step, the alert questioning in his face. It was easy to see that the death of Louis, and the injury to Tom, added to other disappointments, had borne down heavily upon them.

Until the daughter's appearance, Mrs. Johnson's daughter Idella had tidied up the house and done the cooking; a widow whose house backed against the Lowe's had done the washing; and Dan's increased weekly contribution, together with Louis' insurance money, had kept the pot fitfully simmering. Then the Johnsons moved away; and then Ophelia came. Tom

Pratt had made her give him the old address; and his was the unnamed hand that had the two-family house renovated, repainted, and filled with many of the comforts that Ophelia had grown to expect, and that only money can achieve. It was not easy for the girl to step from the role of mistress, with two servants, to maid-of-all-work for a family of six: but she had been ever apt, and soon had the routine in smooth running order. She still had the washing done out, except her own waists and Boy's suits; and she secured a little girl to help with the cooking and dish-washing. But there was enough to keep her busy.

Phoebe sat in a rocker in one corner of the front room almost all day; Tom, propped up by pillows and surrounded by quilts, occupied the other front corner with his Morris chair. The shot had resulted in partial paralysis of one side; at best he could only limp about, and the white doctor shook his head at insistent questions concerning recovery. These two were company for each other; they made little active demand upon Pheely, except on sunshiny days, when she had to move the chairs out to the front porch. Phoebe dozed, and Tom thought; and

then they talked deliberately, ponderously, to each other; and then Phoebe dozed again, and Tom thought. . . .

But Jake was more of a nuisance. Under the guidance of Mrs. Johnson, he had reached almost the end of the alphabet. Then one by one the letters began slipping from him; so that, when Pheely arrived, he was only sure through L. It was all she could do to help him remember the earlier letters; there came a time when only the first five stayed with him. He was inordinately proud of these: he spent many hours tracing them on the front yard dirt. He would call in the neighbors to admire them; and to many of them it was a marvel.

When he was not talking about his educational progress to some passerby he had tolled in, he often followed Pheely around the house, expounding his theories. Boy, at least, was a patient listener, perched upon his great-grandfather's knee, and counting the buttons on his stained vest. If he could not secure an audience thus, for Boy had to go to bed on schedule, there were always Phoebe and Tom. Phoebe would wake from her doze to mumble

“Yeah, yeah,” at the proper place; and Tom would listen, and think . . . think . . .

“Dis heah Boy heah,” he finally came to the conclusion, “jes’ watch him l’arnin’! We all been aimin’ for ’mancipation. It wouldn’t s’prise me at all, at all, ef Boy’d be de one ter fin’ it. . . .”

Phoebe had been a doer all her life, and not a talker; but the inaction and the constant association with Tom’s caustic tones and earnest brain gradually loosened her tongue. She still stood in awe of Jake’s eloquent “argufications”; but the day came when she surprised him and herself by taking him up on his chosen theme, and differing with him. Perhaps she had grown to realize that there was a time for keeping still, and a time for talking; and that her time for talking had arrived.

“Jake,” she began, “you been talkin’ ’bout ’mancipation all yo’ life.”

“Yassum, I is.”

“You’ll talk ’bout it tell you dies.”

“’Speck’ so.”

“An’ I done come to de conclusion dat you

jes' plumb missed de whole subjec', ev'y time you argufy 'bout it."

Pheely, passing through the bedroom, sensed the unfamiliar rôle that Phoebe was playing, and stopped to listen. Tom watched, as usual, with his half-opened eyes, and thought.

"'Ooman, w'ut does you mean? I miss de whole subjec', w'en I been atter dis 'mancipation—"

"Yeah, de whole subjec'." Phoebe continued to rock peacefully, but there was a glitter in her eyes that had been absent for many days. "You been talkin' 'bout 'mancipation, w'ut President Linkum brung ter de cullud race, aincher?"

"Yeah, I been—"

"You been 'spec'in' ter fin' dis heah 'mancipation th'ough book-l'arnin', er th'ough dis heah war, er th'ough sumpin' else is gwinter happen heah on dis heah earth, aincher?"

"Sho, I been—"

"An' you wuz wrong f'um Alphy ter Omega Oil."

"Huccome you talk 'bout Omega Oil? W'ut's dat got to do—"

"Hit's got a plenty, I'm a-tellin' you. I

heard Brudder Kirkman talk 'bout Alphy 'n' Omega Oil plenty er times. Now, lemme hab de say. Dar is 'mancipation comin' fer de cullud race, an' I knows whar it am ter be foun'."

A sense of growing indignity at being robbed of the center of the stage choked Jake's voice, and made his face swell. "W'y, 'ooman—"

"You needn' 'ooman' me, man. I say I knows whar it am ter be foun'. An' you axes me, whar am it ter be foun'?"

"Dat's w'ut I axes you."

A soft shimmer of certainty gleamed from her eyes, a sense of gentle triumph wrinkled her face. "Dis heah 'mancipation am foun' in de Good Book, an' nowhar else."

"W'y, 'ooman—"

"De Good Book, I says, an' de Good Book I means. You been lookin' fer 'mancipation in de life w'ut is; but dis heah 'mancipation ain' gwine come till de life to come. Dat's my word."

"Why, President Linkum he—"

"Dat's my word. W'en I dies, all dis toilin' an' tribulatin' gwineter be over. Dar won' be no w'ite an' no cullud den. You won' be

black in Hebb'n; I won' be black in Hebb'n. Black gwineter be white. De black cat gwineter be as white as de nanny goat, an' de black coal gwineter be white as sugar, in Hebb'n. Ain' dat gospel?"

"Yeah, but dis—"

"An' if dat ain' w'ut 'mancipation means, it don' mean nothin'. You talks 'bout 'quality; don' 'quality mean all white, er all black? Ev'ything's gwineter be black in Hell; ev'ything's gwineter be white, in Hebb'n. Dat's 'quality. Dat's 'mancipation. W'ite folks, you say, is 'quality folks heah on dis earth; all folks gwineter be 'quality folks in Hebb'n. I'm gwineter be white ez snow; no black, no chaw-klut, no tan, no dirty pink—all smooth w'ite. W'ite as chiny-ware. W'ite as laundry. W'ite as 'mancipation." She leaned back, exhausted by her effort. Her eyes closed.

"Well, Phoebe, I ain' sayin' you ain' right. I ain' sayin' you is. Dar's 'mancipation in Hebb'n. Ain' dar? Answer me dat."

"Yeah, yeah. . . ." Her response was drowsy, as of old.

"Dar's 'mancipation on earth too, I verily b'lieves. I ain' foun' it, you says. I ain' foun'

no Nawth Pole, is I? In cou'se not. I ain' foun' no New Yawk, is I? In cou'se not. I ain' foun' no lions er taggers, ner no wells spoutin' oil en' turkentine, yeah, ner no oceans, ner no w'ales 'n' great fishes 'n' Sodoms 'n' Gomorrers 'n' cedars uv Lebanon 'n' bulls er Basham, is I? In cou'se not. Dat ain' sayin' dey ain' waitin' fer de right man ter fin' em de right place de right time. Yeah. Yeah. I verily b'lieves de black man gwineter fin' dis 'mancipation in dis heah life. But I knows, an' I done always said, dat de black man gwineter fin' 'mancipation in Hebb'n. You won't 'spute dat, will yer? Naw. Naw. You won'. Nobody gwineter. Naw."

"Well," Tom said quietly. "I hope you find Heaven. We've found hell, all right."

"W'ut you means, you hopes I fin'?"

"I hope you find it. That's all. W'en I lives, I lives. W'en I dies, I'm gwineter die. That's all. That's all."

"But you gwineter—you gwineter—"

"I gwineter what? Go to Heaven. Mebbe. Mebbe. I ain't seen no Heaven yet. No man I knows has seen it. I read about it, yeah, an' I hear 'bout it. Seein's believin'."

“Don’ you believe—”

“I believes w’ut I sees, and that’s all. This heah world’s hard enough. I don’t want to bother with no mo’. I’ve had enough. I’ve had enough.”

“W’y, boy, you sho’ly—”

“There’s a lot uv hard-headed men say they don’t know nothin’ about Heaven. Scientists. Big men. White men. Most cullud men still believes. I ain’t so sho. I ain’t worryin’ about it.”

Jake continued his expostulations, but he could arouse no more fire in Tom; and Phoebe drowsed away.

There was not much news of Marthula. Her second child, also a boy, was not so healthy as the first one; this kept her at home more than before. On one of her visits she took Ophelia aside for a long talk. “You watch over Aunt Phoebe, chil’; she’s changed a lot since I was here, only a month ago.”

“I don’t see it—”

“You see ‘her every day. You watch her. . . .”

Pheely did not have to watch long. It was hardly a week later when she went in to call

the grandparents to breakfast, and found Jake up and out somewhere, and his wife still in bed.

“Come on, Gram’ma; time to get up.”

There was no answer from the bed.

Pheely came over quietly, and stood looking at the still figure. It was breathing regularly.

“Gram’ma! . . . Wake up!”

When she did not respond, the girl sent her little helper for the doctor. There was nothing he could do, he said. . . . He left some medicine. “She’s a pretty old woman,” he repeated. “They don’t mend lak us younger uns.” He ogled ingratiatingly at Pheely; but as he must have been at least fifty, she was unimpressed.

Jake hovered around the bed all day; he was much in the way. He did not take the matter seriously; he was vaguely puzzled at this break in the routine. Phoebe ought to be in her rocker, not in bed. . . . It was a good sunshiny day, too; Tom was out on the porch. . . .

Toward afternoon she recovered consciousness. Marthula had been ’phoned for; although the doctor said that she might live a month, even if she did not get well.

She listened amiably to the doings of Marthula's two children, and exchanged a few confidences with Boy, who was almost three. Her voice was weak, but otherwise she seemed as well as usual. Just weakness. . . .

She sank rapidly as the dusk came on. Almost all night her gentle breathing continued. The doctor came twice, at Pheely's urgent call; he said there was no especial need to worry. He promised to return at daybreak.

Pheely at last put on her nightgown, and tiptoed back for a final reassuring look. Phoebe was dead.

The girl slipped out and got the doctor; there seemed nothing else to do. He came willingly enough; there was nothing else he could do—for her grandmother, he smiled ingratiatingly: he might sit around a little. . . . Pheely dismissed him shortly. She decided not to tell the family until morning. She sat quietly in the room beside the body; she had a few new books to dip into. . . .

The funeral was delayed until Sunday. Daniel could not come—it was his day shift; but all the others were there. Even Tom went in a carriage, after Brother Kirkman had

finished the services in the home. Tom enjoyed the ride; it was the first time he had been out since his injury.

Jake wore a vaguely puzzled look; he did not seem quite sure whose funeral he was attending. Twice he asked Pheely something indefinite about Phoebe's coming. . . . She told him not to worry.

There were many tears after the old preacher's kindly words of praise for the dead woman's good life. These were mainly from the neighbors. Jake did not cry: he watched the others. Tom's face was set and stern; Pheely held her grief, such as it was, deep within herself. Marthula was different. . . .

They drove back over the mountain as the sun was setting. The sky was gray and shadowed behind them; but the western ways were paths golden and crimson, and the ride down was through the rich afternoon glow.

A group of small boys threw rocks at the last carriage, the one containing Tom and Pheely, as they passed Avenue E. These did no damage.

Pheely had arranged for the girl to come in and sleep with Boy, after her return from the

funeral. Several nights recently she had been away; a note had been slipped her that morning, that Tom Pratt would be waiting for her with the car at the usual corner. . . . She changed from her black to another dress, slipped a dark coat over it, and passed out of the front door. It was not all that she had once dreamed of: it was something.

Jake went through the house, looking for her, and for Phoebe. He did not call for them; he felt that it was not the thing to do. There was Dan in the front room—Dan, resting after his day shift. Tom was in bed; the room was unlighted. Jake stood for a long time watching the eldest grandson's head bowed forward, etched black against the lighted glare of the street corner outside. Dan was not asleep . . . he was resting . . . brooding. . . . And old Jake suddenly saw the face bathed in a startling light of realization. It was not the face of an animal he saw: it was not quite the face of a man. For a wearied man is a little less than a man, and still more than the animals. There were centuries of dumb, dark brooding written on that face. It was a face in repose—the face of a people in repose, of a people con-

demned to bear the world's heaviest burdens, with only time in the fired twilight to rest a little, before the morrow's burdens came again.

Jake turned and went back into the bedroom.

Where was Phoebe? She was. . . . Why, she was not here. It was all right: he had been to the funeral. Phoebe's funeral. . . .

It was night. Mechanically he undressed, and slipped into bed. He lay staring at the darkness. There was a long darkness behind him; and his puzzled mind travelled over this. . . . And the room was dark. . . . And tomorrow was dark. . . .

Tomorrow was dark. There was emancipation waiting at the end of the road, that he knew. Old Jim Gaines—huh! Dead a long time. He was a bad negro, always in and out of trouble. He had laughed at education, and emancipation. . . . Jake had set out to find it.

'Thuly, now, was doing pretty well, and Pheely. Tom wouldn't do much. . . . But 'Thuly's two boys, and little Boy—they were spry youngsters. All looking for emancipation. He had thought that Pink . . . that Louis. . . . Well, things didn't always turn out right. Not always.

Jake began to talk. . . .

"Ejjication," he began slowly and quietly, "I ain' had much ejjication. Not till I wuz pretty ol'. I picked up quite a bit. I kin make de bes' 'A. . . .

"Dat's de way, ejjication is. . . . You says 'mancipation don' come till Hebb'n, Phoebe. Now didn' you? You done forgit ejjication, I be boun'. Didn' you, now?

"Naw, Dan's a furnace han'—an' Tom's wu'thless. But dey ain' all. . . . 'Thuly—she got some. . . . An' Pheely; only girls don' count so much. But—look at Louis, Phoebe; you say lawyerin' ain' 'mancipation? Pink's gwine ter be a lawyer. . . . Dat he is. . . . Dat he is. . . .

"Lemme talk, 'ooman; I has de floor. Listen to w'ut I's a-sayin'. Dey gwinter fin' 'mancipation—gwineter fin' it heah an' now. . . . Don' tell me none uv dat wu'thless stuff 'bout cawn-fiel' niggus ain' need no ejjication; my sons dey gwinter hab it; den you watch 'em!

"I cain' heah you, Jim; listen to dat racket! Man, dat wuz de fu'st noise I ebber heah'd. 'Knee deep—knee deep—better go 'roun'!' Better go 'roun'!' Dat's w'ut dey says, dat

is. . . . 'Knee deep! Knee deep!' . . . It's deeper 'n' dat, Jim; deeper 'n' dat. . . . Better go 'roun', w'ile de goin's good. . . . Nigger's gotter go 'roun', else he ain' nebber gwine fin' no 'mancipation. . . . 'mancipation . . . Dat's de ticket, Jim. . . . 'Mancipation!

"Listen ter dat racket! I cain't sleep wid-out it, I heah'd it so long. . . . Knee deep! Knee deep! Better go 'roun'! . . ."

Tom, in the next room, turned over and groaned. Sweat broke out on Jake's forehead; he shrank down within the covers, fear on his face. "We gotter go fas', Jim. . . . Don' min' yo' ol' trash, man; come on! Fastuh, fastuh. . . . Oh, Lawdie, Lawdie!"

A car turned the corner with its noisy clanging. The light from the furnace across the vacant lots flared up into the clouds, spreading horizontally across the intervening spaces, and dyeing Dan's stooped form, asleep in the chair at the front window, a ruddy bronze. A policeman sauntered down the Avenue, and turned up the street to the south. Everything quiet. . . .

"Oh, Lawdie, Lawdie! . . . Knee deep. . . ."

Slowly the troubled creases left the wrinkled

old forehead. The chorus of swamp frogs swelled and shivered in his tortured memory, until it possessed him.



